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A study of the impact of single-gender classes on middle school students in an urban setting

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A STUDY OF THE IMPACT OF SINGLE-GENDER CLASSES ON MIDDLE SCHOOL STUDENTS IN AN URBAN SETTING

by
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Dedication

This study is dedicated to the memory of my beloved grandfather Holland Fitz Herbert Barnett, former principal, who worked assiduously to provide me with effective and meaningful life experiences. I am eternally appreciative of his guidance, faith, devotion, and unconditional love. He raised me to be the woman of substance that I am today.

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I would like to take this opportunity to pay homage to my sweet mother, her majesty, Jean Albertha Barnett. Thank you for your unconditional love, support, and guidance. Your strength and supremacy is second to none except God, my heavenly father. Sasha, Stacy Cooper, Esquire, and Dr. Sisly "my angels" the three nicest daughters whom any mother could ever hope for. You continue to surpass any expectations that I may have of you. I continue to enjoy every second as I watch you blossom into three phenomenal women. To my beautiful sisters, Debbie and Diane, thank you for your inspiration, words of encouragement, and for the incredible bond that we continue to share. Dr. Jenifer and Miss Lashae are my lovely nieces who continuously remind me of the fact that I am the best auntie in the world.

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awakening in my soul a strong sense of passion, faith, accountability, and enthusiasm for

my work as an educator. I am forever grateful!

Abstract

Deniese E. Barnett-Cooper
A STUDY OF THE IMPACT OF SINGLE-GENDER CLASSES ON MIDDLE
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2010/2011
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Educational Leadership

With the passing of No Child Left Behind (NCLB) and the levels of
accountability that it has placed upon educators and school districts regarding student
performance on standardized assessments, there has been a surfeit of initiatives and
options to address appropriate prescriptions for academically ailing students. A
potentially dramatic turnaround came in March 2004, when the Office of Civil Rights
(OCR) issued proposals that permitted public single-gender schools and classes with few
limitations. Additionally, within the past decade, the release of restrictions of Title IX,
which originally prohibited the separation of genders, facilitated opportunities to
implement single-gender schools and classes in an attempt to close the gender
achievement gap and positively influence student academic performance. The middle
school years represent a critical time for young teens. Middle schools have been blamed
for the increase in student behavior problems and cited as the cause of teens' alienation,
disengagement from school, and low academic achievement. Chenoweth (2007)
described the middle school as the most challenging level of the school system. As their
hormones begin to flow, students are unable to handle the changes in their bodies much
less manage their academic vocation. The term "crisis" is appropriately used when
describing the predicament of urban middle school students. Duhon (2001) agreed that

these disengaged and unmotivated students are usually at the bottom quarter of the class scholastically. Additionally, it is often their awful behavior that identifies them. The 42 participants consisted of 6th, 7th, and 8 th grade students at Hopeville Community School. They were chosen using a simple random selection process. Data collection tools included parent, student, and teacher surveys, individual interviews, observations, and document collection. The study utilized a mixed research method and an analysis of the quantitative data was completed utilizing SPSS software program. An analysis of the data revealed that single-gender classes, to some degree, positively impacted students' behavior, self-efficacy, relationship with peers and teachers, academic engagement, and academic performance on district and teacher created tests. Findings also disclosed students' inability to obtain a level of proficiency on standardized assessment, however, growth models indicated individual progress made by 60% of the students. Nevertheless, the conjecture entrenched in the data demonstrated that student academic achievement was profoundly impacted by effective teacher classroom management skills, teacher display of empathy, level of expectation for students, and delivery of instruction. Positive and encouraging teacher student communication and interactions illustrating mutual respect between teacher and students were essential. Teachers' ability to show interest and concern for students created a trusting and genuine bond with them and in most cases students reciprocated. Establishing trust and making connections with students were crucial in the development of meaningful relationships.

Table of Contents

Table of Contents (Continued)

Table of Contents (Continued)

Table of Contents (Continued)

List of Figures

List of Tables

Chapter 1: Introduction

Problem Statement

It appears that as both male and female students enter primary grades and embark on their educational journey, the playing field is equal. Males and females tend to perform equally as well on standardized tests and report cards. As they move into the upper elementary grades and beyond, we begin to see two distinct gaps in achievement that occur between male and female students. The first is that females begin to surpass their male counterparts on standardized tests and report card grades. As they reach graduation, females receive higher grades, attain more college scholarships, and have a higher percentage attending college than their male peers. The gender achievement gap refers to the observed disparity on a number of education measures between the performance of male and female students. The achievement gap can be observed on a variety of measures including student performance on standardized assessments. The basis of these gender differences has long been a subject of intense discussion and debate. Though tests of general intelligence suggest no overall variations between male and females, there are considerable gender differences in scores on specific cognitive tasks. Males perform better at certain spatial visual tasks and females excel verbally. While these differences may result from divergence in hormonal exposure and significant dissimilarities in male and female brain structures, it is also possible that disparity in student academic engagement and achievement arise from the fact that teachers may not differentiate their style of teaching or adjust their delivery of instruction to accommodate the needs of both genders.

On a number of counts, the evidence in the current body of literature suggests that more males than female students are experiencing difficulties in school. Cleveland (2011) described the educating of boys as a genuine crisis that necessitates a major shift in American educational policy. Boys appear to be less engaged in school and are more likely to display discipline issues. Females have made vast improvements in the area of math, which was initially deemed a male-dominated subject. To date, boys and girls are performing equally in this subject area. Boys' assessments of reading and writing were considerably weaker than those of females. This is consistent with results of standardized tests that show higher literacy scores for girls compared to boys. Recent reports have also confirmed that boys, not girls, are increasingly on the unfavorable side of the gender gaps in education and developmental matters (Leahey & Guo, 2001).

To create a more equitable learning environment for both male and female students it is imperative that educators accommodate specific learning differences tied to gender (Kunjufu, 2005). Teachers as well as parents tend to disregard gender when asked about students'specific abilities in the areas of math, science, and literacy. When interacting with, encouraging, listening to, and acknowledging their students, teachers are able to treat both sexes equally (Goodman&Webb, 2006). According to, Leedy, Runk and LaLonde (2003), researchers sense that gender plays a major role in the level of academic achievement.

The gender achievement gap along with the issues and challenges regarding the academic performance and attitudes of middle-school students have renewed interest and experimentation with single-gender education classes and schools. Friend (2006a)

observed, "Student achievement data continues to demonstrate inequities or 'gender gaps' among students" (p. 56).

Creating an environment where boys and girls aspire to achieve academically is critical. For educational leaders, teachers, and parents, single-gender schools and classes have become a desirable alternative to the traditional school. As mandated by No Child Left Behind (NCLB), educational practices identified as having the possibility to increase student academic achievement in public schools must be research based. Verification of the effectiveness of these innovative instructional strategies, through sound scholarly research and data, is critical for implementation as well as the allocation of federal funds disseminated by NCLB. As schools and educational organizations face increasing levels of accountability regarding student achievement and performance on standardized tests, it is imperative that new avenues are explored and investigated. Gilbert (2000) agreed, "The support of parents, the inspiration of teachers and coaches, and equal opportunity can offset biological differences to bring out the best in each child" (p. 250). Strong partnerships in their social settings and collaboration among parents and teachers are necessary to effectively resolve the issues and challenges that students may encounter.

The disparities regarding gender achievement, student self-efficacy, attitude, academic disengagement, behavior, relationships with peers and teachers, and students'continuous failure to obtain a level of proficiency on standardized assessments have become major areas of concern for educators and parents. According to Dweck (2003), studies support the belief that when both male and female students enter the middle level grades, their enthusiasm for learning decreases and there is a considerable increase in behavioral and discipline issues. The transition to junior high is a challenging

time for students. The academic work load is more exigent and the differentation of instruction is less personalized. As a result of their frustration, students often become disruptive and disengaged. If provisions are made to appropriately address these matters, opportunities for students to prosper academically will be increased. District leaders, teachers, and parents can better assist middle school students if they understand the dissimilar development phases of male and female students, their unique needs, capabilities, and their challenges (Perlstein, 2003).

Impetus for the Study

As a result of the growing concern regarding the gender gap, single-gender education has become an alternative that is offered by many schools. According to (McNeil, 2008), it grew from a total of 11 public schools in 2002, to approximately 518 in 2010. Under this growing umbrella of public school choice, single-gender classes are spreading across the nation. Single-gender schools and classes are a popular option in urban public school districts such as New York City, particularly as a strategy for raising the achievement of African American boys. South Carolina is at the forefront of implementing such programs statewide. In addition to academic achievement, a wide variety of outcome variables have been explored in recent research: improved attendance rates, reduction of discipline referrals, boost in student ambitions, and elevated levels of student self-esteem. For example, Barnes and Hall in 2006 published research findings that support the claim that single-gender education is a feasible approach for maximizing student academic achievement along with improving attendance.

Friend (2006b) reported, "Private and parochial schools in the United States have maintained opportunities for students to attend same-gender settings without interference

from policies governing public education" (p. 55). They have always been able to establish single-gender classes without much interference or scrutiny from the U. S. Department of Education. In public schools, the curriculum and gender composition have been influenced by society, regulations, and educational initiatives.

Cuizon (2008) explained that the idea of single-gender classes in public schools dates back to colonial America. Lessons were purposefully designed to prepare boys and girls for different roles in life. Boys were taught basic math and reading. They were also prepared to acquire skills in the areas of agriculture, farming, or industrial arts while girls were taught home economics in preparation for their roles as mothers and housewives. (as cited in Cable & Spradlin, 2008).

For almost 30 years, the Office of Civil Rights (OCR) in the Department of Education adhered to a policy prohibiting public schools from separating girls and boys for all or part of the school day with few exceptions. Legislation such as Title IX of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act and the Women's Educational Equity Act were passed. They both had a tremendous impact on single-gender schools and programs. In 1972 girls and women faced numerous barriers in education. Nationwide, awareness of societal discrimination against women was growing. One example of the discrimination that women faced was the refusal of educational institutions to grant them admission on the basis of gender. During the Congressional hearings of 1972, witnesses presented evidence of rampant discrimination in education. Title IX was enacted as part of the Education Amendments of 1972. With the passing of this act, the role of women and girls in education and the work force began to change drastically. Title IX ensures legal protection against discrimination for students and employees, which includes protection

against sexual harassment. It prohibits discrimination on the basis of gender in educational institutions receiving financial assistance from the federal government. The act pertains to public as well as private educational institutions. It covers admission, recruitment, programs, activities, course offerings, counseling, financial aid, employment assistance, facilities and housing, insurance benefits and services, scholarships, and athletics. It also protects from discrimination against marital and parental status.

It was patterned after Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, which prohibited discrimination on the grounds of race, color, or national origin in any program or activity receiving federal financial assistance. Unlike Title VI, however, Title IX proscribed discrimination only in education. Likewise, the Women's Educational Equity Act (WEEA) of 1974 was one of the several landmark laws passed by the United States Congress outlining federal protections against the gender discrimination of women in education (Riordan, 1990).

The first official sign of change appeared in 2001 when, as part of the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB), Congress approved federal funds for ground-breaking educational programs, including single-gender schools and classrooms, consistent with applicable law. Salomone (2006) explained, "a potentially dramatic turnaround came in March 2004, when the Office of Civil Rights (OCR) issued proposals that would permit public single-sex schools and classes with few limitations" (p. 779). With the level of accountability faced by school districts regarding student performance on standardized assessments, policies were changed in order to encourage and accommodate the exploration of new educational approaches and initiatives.

An amendment to NCLB provided $3 million in grants for school and district leaders to take a serious look at single-gender schools and classrooms. Following the acquisition of financial imbursement and the pursuit of innovative educational initiatives, many were indecisive and hesitant to show their support for single-gender schools and classrooms. According to Salomone (2006), "The dramatic turnaround in federal policy and the seeming inconsistencies in the law have sparked heated debates that have plumbed the depths of gender, race, and ideology. Yet both sides concur that research findings supporting single-sex schooling are inconclusive" (p. 782).

For decades, the presumption was that coed schools provided a more equitable learning environment that was accommodating for all students. In recent years a number of researchers have built an increasingly persuasive case that coed schools in many cases are not educating girls as well as boys. Lewis (2006) agreed that regardless of possible litigation, school districts in many states have made the decision to implement single-gender classes and schools. The decision was based on new knowledge regarding the learning differences between the genders and was also an attempt to improve male engagement in education in general. Currently, NCLB allows federal funding to be used for innovative and experimental education programs that are geared to positively influencing student academic achievement.

NCLB brought reforms and mandates that called for school and district leaders to close the achievement gap between groups of students. The policy also established an elevated level of accountability for schools and educational organizations. Murray (2008) stated, "It raised the stakes for educating students in the lower half of the academic ability

distribution to unprecedented levels, imposing severe penalties on schools that failed to meet progress goals that were set according to test scores" (p. 60).

The new regulations also eradicated the confusion surrounding the legal status of single-gender schools which were all-girls or all-boys. In fact, new regulations provided some incentive for school districts to offer single-gender schools rather than single-gender classrooms within coed schools. Schools do not have to provide any rationale for their single-gender format, and are not required to conduct any periodic review to determine whether single-gender education is necessary to remedy some inequity. They do have to offer substantially equal courses, services, and facilities, at other schools within the same school district, but those other schools can be single-gender or coed. In other words, a school district cannot offer a single-gender high school for girls without having to offer a single-gender high school for boys. According to NCLB, a school district cannot offer an all-boys elementary school without offering an all-girls elementary school.

In order to successfully address the academic and social emotional needs of students, it is imperative that new avenues are explored and investigated. The possibility exists that there is a direct correlation between students' behavior, level of comfort, academic engagement, self-efficacy, ability to maintain healthy relationships with others, and their ability to prosper academically. It is therefore important that schools develop priorities or goals outlining the importance of healthy social, behavioral, emotional, ethical, and intellectual development. Students must be involved in activities that are relevant, meaningful, and authentic to the desired knowledge. They must be taught to become critical thinkers, problem solvers, and productive humanitarians who are able to exist harmoniously with others. Additionally, teachers should be seen as dedicated and competent

professionals, who are able to group students appropriately, make use of instructional materials, design and structure the lesson, and deliver instruction with patience and confidence. The success of a student also depends immensely on how much the student is engaged in the learning process and their level of confidence and determination regarding the attainment of their future goals and aspirations.

Purpose of Study

The purpose of this research study was to examine the impact of single-gender classes on the self-efficacy, level of comfort, academic engagement and performance, relationships with peers and teachers, and the behavior of middle-school students in an urban setting. When students are grouped appropriately and are comfortable in their school settings, they are more apt to value the acquisition of a good education. Being fully engaged in their learning can stimulate curiosity, provide the freedom to express their creativity, encourage them to be accountable for their actions, and foster positive relationships with others. Gurian and Stevens suggested "We now have the science to prove our intuition that boys and girls do indeed learn differently. And even more powerful, we have a number of years of successful data that can help us effectively teach both boys and girls" (p. 4).

The school where the research was conducted was classified as one that was chronically failing and in urgent need of transformation. For the past 15 years, there had been a major decline in student performance which reflected dismal scores on state and district assessments. Student surveys conducted by the School Leadership Committee (SLC) indicated a lack of enthusiasm and motivation for learning as students transition from elementary to the middle school grades. Student engagement was pratically nonexistent and there was a major disconnect between students' attitudes and the goals

and mission of the school. According to the school's monthly discipline atom there was also a considerable increase in violent incidents at the school. Nogera (2003) believed that the majority of urban schools are in a state of crisis and are in a condition of deteriotation.

During the 2008-2009 school year, the school underwent an annual review by the Collaborative Assessment and Planning for Achievement (CAPA), which was a state mandated 2-day process that focused on Title I schools which under NCLB were identified as schools in need of improvement and restructure. During the visit, the CAPA team, in collaboration with school and district administrators, analyzed data, held discussions with stakeholders, and conducted classroom visits. A strategic plan of action was developed to improve the quality of instruction, build capacity among staff, and increase standardized test scores. Additionally, the plan included the alignment of day-to-day practices with the mission and vision of the school.

Shortly thereafter, Cambridge Review, a British consulting committee hired by the district, conducted an analysis of the needs of the school. Its findings and recommendations mirrored those of CAPA. Like CAPA, their major areas of concern and focus included the continuous dismal performance, disciplinary issues, and the lack of enthusiasm for learning experienced by middle school students. They recommended the implementation of best educational practices, initiatives, and programs which would serve to empower students, enhance their self-efficacy, diminish discipline issues, improve relationships with teachers and peers, and positively influence student performance on district and state assessments.

The participants consisted of 21 middle school girls and 21 middle school boys. They participated in the research study, which was an experimental program that initiated single-gender classes at Hopeville Community School (pseudonym). Since single-gender classes were implemented throughout the middle school cohort that consisted of 196 middle school students, there were no specific criteria or perquisites required for students to participate in the pilot program. Parents were informed of the school's initiative and 100% of them were supportive of the new program as evidenced by letters of consent which they signed in support of the program. It was imperative that school leaders, teachers, and families worked cohesively to creative a supportive culture for children.

Downey (2003) mentioned, " Evidence of program effectiveness ahead of time provides the administrator with greater precision in selecting and implementing programmatic options and alternatives to deliver organizational aims and purposes" (p. 93). The decision was made to implement single-gender experimental classes in the middle school grades. The names of the middle school students were placed in two jars; one contained the names of all male students and the other contained the names of the female students in grades sixth through eight. A total of 25 names were randomly selected from each jar. Out of the 50 names that were chosen, a total of 42 students (21 boys and 21 girls) received permission from parents and guardians to participate in the study. The decision was made to work with the 42 respondants, particularly since each gender was equally represented. Data collected from this study served to answer the following guiding research questions.

Research Questions

1. How did participating in single-gender classes impact the academic engagement and performance of middle school students in an urban setting?

2. How did participating in single-gender classes influence the behavior of middle school students in an urban setting?

3. How did participating in single-gender classes influence the self-efficacy of middle school students in an urban setting?

4. How did teachers align their teaching practices and pedagogy to accommodate single-gender classes?

5. How did my leadership practices as a principal influence the successful implementation of single-gender classes in an urban setting?

Significance of Study

Conducting the inquiry of how single-gender classes affect middle school students in an urban setting presents significant information to educators. Important data can be gathered regarding factors that constitute best educational practices for ensuring effective, meaningful, and quality learning experiences for students. Wilson and Horch (2002) mentioned "Two existing areas of interest for educators of middle school students are brain maturation during the adolescent years and possible gender differences in how adolescents learn" (p. 57).

The middle school years represent a critical time for young teens. Middle schools have been blamed for the increase in student behavior problems and cited as the cause of their estrangement, academic disengagement and low academic achievement. Middle school students represent the population of students that has been classified and placed in

special education classes, suspended continuously as a result of disciplinary infractions, failed to attain a level of proficiency on standardized assessments, demonstrated low self-efficacy, and ultimately became dropouts (Clarke, 1989). These statistics are profoundly prevalent among urban middle school students and provided the rationale for this research study. The investigation is crucial and will ultimately augment the current literature regarding single-gender education. It is an initiative that should be taken into serious consideration due to the fact that any evidence to support its relevance should be explored and possibly implemented in order to address their growing needs. Stanworth (1981) remarked, "The vision of equal opportunity which underpinned meritocratic dreams deserves to be elaborated" (p. 9). The findings of this study will be used as a basis to encourage further exploration, and possible expansion of single-gender schools and classes.

Clark (1989) believed that the educational system continuously fails the middle schools students. He stated that they are not adequately prepared to thrive in a demanding society. Considering the delimma of urban middle school students and their continuous failure to perform well on state, district, and standardized assessments, the information retrieved from this research study can be beneficial in designing coherent educational programs to address the needs of this student population. Consequently, the findings of this study may be quite instrumental in reducing the rate of suspensions and discipline infractions, diminishing the number of dropouts, boosting student self-efficacy, enhancing opportunities for learning, increasing student engagement, improving individual student level of comfort, and ultimately closing the gender achievement gap. Price (2002) agreed,

Accountability in education isn't confined to meeting the standards and regulations imposed by various layers of government, from the local district to the state and the feds. In my opinion, true accountability means meeting the educational needs of children and parents who put their faith in a school system and trust it to cultivate the potential of its pupils and equip them academically for adulthood. (p. 128)

Definition of Terms

In this research study of the impact of single-gender education on middle school students in an urban setting, the following terms were used.

Academic Engagement	Students show enthusiasm for their school work by raising questions, contributing to lessons and activities and taking an active role in their learning.
Achievement	The levels at which students perform on district and state assessments.
Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP)	The measure of year to year student achievement on statewide assessments.
Aptitude	An inherent natural ability for learning.
Curriculum	A group of related ideas within an academic course.
Discipline Atom	A document which contains the names of students and a description of their infractions that warrants suspension or explusion from school.
Motivation	The factors that cause an organism to act in a goal-seeking or satisfying manner.

14

Self-efficacy	Beliefs in one's capability to execute the courses of action necessary to achieve a particular goal or intended outcome.
Single-gender classrooms	Classrooms containing students of one gender (e.g., all male or all female).
Standardized assessments	A variety of tests that allow students to demonstrate understanding of common skills and objectives.
Traditional classrooms	Classrooms containing students of both genders.

Conclusion

The gender achievement gap and the issues and challenges regarding middle school students have renewed interest and experimentation with single-gender classes and schools. As schools and educational organizations are faced with increasing levels of accountability as it pertains to student achievement and performance on standardized assessments, it is imperative that new avenues are explored and investigated. Sommers (2000) highlighted, "It is a gap that should concern parents, school boards, and legislators. Engagement with schools is perhaps the single most important predictor of academic success" (p. 29). Additional resarch is required to determine if the implementation of single-gender classes in urban schools can potentially change the statistics as they relate to the dismal performance of middle school students.

Through this dissertation, a reliable, informative, and revealing report will be prepared and shared with the education community, particularly with instructional leaders

who desperately seek strategies to augment student engagement, and improve behavior, relationships, level of comfort, and self-efficacy in urban middle school students which will subsequently boost student academic performance, particularly on standardized assessments. This might also be of special interest to parents who continuously grapple with dilemmas regarding the lack of enthusiasm for learning and the academic disconnect of their middle school youngsters.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Studies of student achievement continue to show disparities between the performances of the males and females. While schools may not cause such gender differences, they may still have a significant role to play in ensuring that both sexes have the opportunity to develop a broad range of intellectual skills. It is imperative that schools are attentive to the issues of both male and female students. Teachers should make sure that in the early grades boys who lag developmentally in reading skills are not stigmatized as "slow learners" and assigned to classes where they receive lower-quality instruction. Teachers should also avoid labeling unruly boys as suffering from Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) and prescribing drugs that depress their nervous systems and ability to learn. By the same token, girls should be encouraged to take mathematics and science courses and to participate in these classes more. Research studies and other literature state the need for educators to explore ways to close the achievement gap between male and female students and to improve achievement for all students (Klienfield & Yerian, 1995).

One such instructional strategy identified by some educational researchers as having the potential to facilitate the educational experience for all students is single-gender education. Single-gender education refers to the education of students in an environment that consists of a single-gender, that being all-male or all-female. Single-gender environment may take the form of single-gender classes, consisting of either males or females within a coeducational school setting, or a single-gender school, consisting of all single-gender classes.

In order to close the gender achievement gap, it is imperative that educational leaders and policy makers identify educational initiatives, strategies, and best practices which will successfully address the academic as well as the social emotional development of both sexes. Evidence of the creditability of these newly identified instructional strategies, through well-conducted scholarly research methodologies, will be necessary for implementation of those strategies and for the receipt of promised additional federal funds as allocated by NCLB.

This section outlines the scholarly professional literature relevant to this research study. The span of the literature review begins with the presentation of a problem regarding the academic disconnect that many middle school students in urban settings experience. It ends with a recommendation that can effectively decipher this issue. This segment of the research begins with the history of single-gender education in the United States. The literature review continues with a comprehensive discussion of the impact of single-gender education on the academic engagement and performance, level of comfort, relationship with peers and teachers, self-efficacy, and behavior of urban middle school students. It also scrutinizes the effects of community demographics, teachers, parents, self-efficacy, and brain-based research, as they relate to student performance. Also included is the manner in which parents, students, and teachers perceive single-gender classrooms.

History of Single-Gender Classes

During colonial times boys, in addition to receiving training to become skilled laborers in specialized areas, also studied math, Greek, Latin, science, celestial navigation, geography, history, fencing, social etiquette, and plantation management. At

18

this point, the sons of wealthy planters often were sent to boarding schools in England to

obtain a more advanced education such as the study of law or medicine. School days for

female students were quite different. Girls learned enough reading to understand their

Bibles, basic writing, and simple arithmetic to be able to record household expenses.

They were taught by a governess, who was usually from England and was somewhat

educated. They studied art, music, social etiquette, needlework, spinning, weaving,

cooking, and nursing. The girls did not have the opportunity to go to England for higher

education, because this was not considered important for them since they were engaged

in activities that prepared them to become housewives and mothers. The function of

gender in shaping achievement motivation has a long history in psychological and

educational research. Duhon (2001) postulated,

> From early colonial times, when schooling was considered to be primarily the
> responsibility of the family, to the modern age of widespread societal involvement
> in educational systems that attempt to include the entire young population, the
> varying needs of the individual child continue to pose a complicated challenge to
> each successive generation. (p. 8)

Early studies drew on achievement motivation theories to explain why adult

women and men differed in their educational and occupational pursuits. Prior to the

1970s, men were more probable than women to obtain the school stage, pursue advanced

study, and go into high-paying occupations. Over the last 3 decades, unprecedented

changes in womens' grade of educational participation and occupational status have been

observed. For the first time in U.S. history, women are earning more school degrees than

men, and they pass men in many fields of study encompassing psychology, accounting,

and health-related professions (U.S. Department of Labor, 2003). The percentage of

women earning professional degrees has also increased substantially in the last 30 years.

Among secondary school students, large gender gaps in mathematics and science performance have decreased, and in some cases, have been eliminated (National Center of Educational Statistics [NCES], 2004). Additionally, with the exclusion of physics, juvenile women today are just as probable as men to take challenging mathematics and science coursework in high school.

At all grade levels of the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), girls exceed boys (NCES, 2004). When achievement patterns are examined by socioeconomic status, ethnicity, or geographic location, there are significant disparities in students' educational achievement and participation across distinct groups. Gender gaps in school performance, favoring girls, are particularly broad for non-White ethnic students (Grant, Ward, & Rong, 1987).

Legislation Regarding Single-Gender Classes

Policies and mandates to provide gender equity consume the history of education in the United States. Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972 prohibits any form of discrimination in federally assisted education programs. Although the amendments include many areas, gender discrimination was at the forefront. Section l68l (a) of Title IX guarantees: "No person in the United States shall, on the basis of sex, be excluded from participation in, be denied the benefits of, or be subjected to discrimination under any education program or activity receiving federal financial assistance" (U.S. Department of Education, n.d., p. l). Discrimination against female students was very prevalent throughout all levels of education after the enactment of Title IX over 3 decades ago.

The U. S. Department of Education (2004) proposed amending the parts of Title IX that pertain to single-gender public education. This came about as a direct result of the NCLB Act of 2001. The Federal Department of Education during the George W. Bush administration issued proposed Title IX regulations and changes which gave the leaders of school districts flexibility in implementing single-gender classes and schools. Vail (2002) added that the move to implement changes to the Title IX single-gender regulations began with the collaborative efforts of U.S. Senators Hillary Clinton and Kay Bailey Hutchinson who sponsored an amendment to NCLB that provided $3 million in grants for school and district leaders to take a serious look at single-gender schools and classrooms.

The proposed amendments allowed greater flexibility for those interested in providing single-gender schools or classes, and also provided an explanation as to how this can be implemented while remaining within the guidelines of Title IX. Unless otherwise noted in the document, these amendments would apply to schools and classes in elementary and secondary education and to both public and private schools. In order to accomplish this, schools were required to make informed researched based data driven decisions to decide if the program was feasible and educationally beneficial to the students. They were also required to treat students of both genders in a fair and ethical manner. Riordan (1990) agreed that once admitted in single-gender schools, both boys and girls must be provided equal treatment with regard to participation in courses and extracurricular activities, benefits and services, and use of school facilities.

Organizations such as The National Organization for Women (NOW) and the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) believed that students in public schools should

21

not have the option of choosing to participate in single-gender education. They stated that single-gender classrooms are unconstitutional since the concept violates the Equal Protection Clause of the Fourteenth Amendment. The amendment stated that the denial of "equal protection of the laws" to all people is unlawful (Walsh, 2004). However, the Supreme Court at the same time, made a ruling to allow single-gender schools to provide comparable education for women.

In 1996, the United States Supreme Court provided clarity regarding the legal elements of single-gender education. In 1991, the United States Justice Department filed a lawsuit against the Virginia Military Institute (VMI), a males-only college. The Department of Justice declared that since VMI was funded by the state, they could not refuse to accept female applicants. The circuit court provided three potential solutions: allow females to attend VMI, refuse state funding, or develop an equivalent institution for female students. Decision makers in the state decided to open the Virginia Women's Institute for Leadership, located at Mary Baldwin College. The circuit court approved this option but the Department of Justice was not pleased with the decision, hence the Supreme Court received it on appeal. In June of 1996, the Supreme Court issued a decision that found the program at Baldwin was inferior to that of VMI. This was as a result of the fact that VMI offered more advanced courses and degrees, offered higher salaries for faculty, and there was a vast amount of athletic amenities that were not provided for the females at Baldwin. The Supreme Court emphasized that this was not simply a case of single-gender education, but one that concerned the obvious inferiority between the two institutions (Sax, 2005).

Lewis (2006) agreed that regardless of possible litigation, school districts in many states have made the decision to implement single-gender classes and schools. The decision is based on new knowledge regarding the learning differences between the genders and also an attempt to improve male engagement in education in general. Currently, NCLB allows federal funding to be used for innovative and experimental education programs that are geared to positively influencing student achievement. To this date approximately 33 states have implemented single-gender schools and classes.

Proponents of Single-Gender Classes

More public and charter schools are experimenting with single-gender classes and are reporting positive results. Leonard Sax (2005), founder of the National Association for Single-Sex Public Education (NASSPE) discussed some factors that led to the phenomenal growth of single-gender education. He and other supporters of the initiative shared their observation that girls often underestimate their own abilities, while boys have unrealistic expectations and are overconfident. When students are grouped in single-gender classes, teachers are better able to address the needs of each group. For example, they present the same information to males and females, however, it is presented differently. They have also observed that girls learn better if they talk about the concept first before taking on the related activity. On the other hand, boys seem to do better when presented with the concept, allowed to experience it, and eventually regroup to discuss it.

Sax (2005) discussed the case of a male student who was diagnosed with attention deficit disorder. After being placed in an all boys class he has shown tremendous improvement both academically and socially. Hahn (2009) supported this claim by stating that students in the same-gender classroom settings are enthusiastic

learners. The boys are becoming better writers and girls are willing to take risks. Additionally, the lack of data has not slowed the popularity of the approach.

Most educational leaders will concede that one of their ultimate goals is to create and sustain a school environment which is safe, supportive, successful, and conducive to learning where valuable instructional time is not monopolized with the continuous addressing of discipline infractions. One major goal for the implementation of single-gender education settings is an attempt by school administrators and leaders to improve classroom behavior and decrease discipline issues. Studies conducted by Bushweller (1994) reported positive outcomes from the study of an all-male class at a middle school. Evans (1991) examined the impact of a school that incorporated single-gender grouping and Richardson (1995) also conducted a study on single-gender education settings. All results indicated a considerable improvement in behavior, academic engagement and performance, and level of enthusiasm for male and female students alike. They worked on the premise that students, like many others, were dealing with typical characteristics of early adolescents. These factors were partially the reasons for the difficulties as the students attempted to cope with the challenges and ordeals of school. Effective discipline strategies call for creativity, consistency, and the collaboration of   all stakeholders.

Many administrators view the separation of the genders as a means to address discipline issues and the lack of student engagement. As mentioned in the article titled "Single-Sex Schooling Gets New Showcase," McNeil (2008), author and principal of Kingstree Junior High School, saw this as a remedy to boost dismal test scores and to rein in serious discipline issues without unnecessary spending. She, like the distict superintendent, agreed that with cutbacks and loss of funding, single-gender classrooms

would prove to be a cost-effective and practical strategy that would be beneficial in the area of character education and also one which had the potential of making a considerable difference.

According to Raudenbush et al. (2008),

> Education policymakers currently advocate enhancing achievement for diverse populations while taking steps toward long-term educational reform. Achieving educational reform or advancing social agendas while improving academic achievement is the goal of legislation, school districts, and teachers. One prominent reform alternative is grouping students according to sex. Proponents of single-sex instruction (SSI) and single-sex education (SSE) support grouping according to sex not only as a method for improving academic achievement but also as a means of offering girls an environment free of male domination. (as cited in Hoffman, Badget, & Parker, p. 1.)

Kunjufu (2006), educator and advocate for single-gender education and the improvement of educational opportunities for poor African American students, invalidated a theory supported by educational consultant Ruby Payne. This theory claimed that poverty was the major factor affecting the outcome of children's academic achievements, hence the name "An African Centered Response to Ruby Payne's Poverty Theory." He provided examples of thriving urban schools where single-gender classes have been successfully implemented.

The first was Thurgood Marshall Elementary School located in Seattle, Washington, which was converted to a single-sex academy with boys and girls taught separately in the same facility. Although the school received no additional funding, students' grades and test scores soared. Discipline problems vanished and Principal Benjamin Wright noticed improved attitudes throughout the school. Prior to the implementation of single-gender classes, the scores for the male students on standardized assessment were extremely dismal. Following their participation in the single-gender

setting, there was a dramatic increase in their academic performance. Likewise there was a major decrease in school violence, dropouts, and referrals for special education. Kunjufu (2006) also discussed the Women's Leadership Academy in Harlem in which approximately 92 % of the females graduated and were accepted into college. Kunjufu attributed these accomplishments to students' participation in single-gender classes.

Critics of Single-Gender Classes

Cooper (2006) stated that organizations such as the National Organization for Women (NOW) and others questioned the experimental single-gender education classes and schools. He also mentioned the views of Dr. Na'im Akbar, renouned psychology professor at Florida State University, who agreed that there was a lack of empirical evidence supporting single-sex education's positive effects for male students. Dr. Pedro Noguera (2003), a sociology professor at New York University, and Dr. Asa Hillard (1999), professor of urban education at Georgia State University, raised cautions about Black boys being forced into single-sex schools and classes. Hillard believed that they could easily become dumping grounds for boys the school does not want any way. While he supports the initiative, Nogurea stated that if single-gender classes are not implemented with the utmost integrity and best interest of students they could become hyper masculine environments that reinforce negative behaviors. (Noguera, 2003)

Riordan (1990) mentioned a second case for coeducation presupposes that educating boys and girls together is natural. Parents and educators believed that single-gender classes may impede the development of positive relations with members of the opposite sex. They argued that it was crucial that boys and girls learn to live and work

26

together. Atherton (1972) believed the separation of the sexes in school created an unrealistic situation.

In order to facilitate female empowerment, many called for the implementation of a school environment which offers girls a setting free of male dominance. Critics argued in opposition and explained that males and females must learn how to live together, and dual-gender classrooms provide the best possible extended laboratory for that. If curricular and classroom management practices negatively affect male and/or female maturation, then the ineffective practices must be extinguished and replaced with researched based best practices. Single-gender classrooms are merely an extension of single-race classrooms. In this situation, negative and counterproductive behaviors would be reinforced. Critics also believed that schools and programs can be designed in many variations as they attempt to raise student achievement. Since single-gender schools and classrooms make no guarantees, he was hesitant to extend his support and faith in the initiative (Sylvester, 2007).

McCloskey (1994), a critic of the initiative, stated that single-gender schooling does not resemble the settings in real life or in the workplace. He also mentioned that separating the genders does not foster an understanding nor does it promote harmonious relationships. He believed that it further glamorizes the opposite sex and encourages promiscuity and an unhealthy curiosity. He added that the possibility of this type of educational setting leads to sexism. Hahn (2009) stated,

> Groups like the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) and the NOW have spoken out against separating boys and girls in schools, saying such classrooms are illegal and discriminatory. Others say the approach promotes gender stereotypes and fails to prepare students for a world where both sexes work together. (p. 3)

Lisa Maatz (2007), public policy director for a university women's group, believed that not enough research exists to prove that single-gender classes guarantee improvement in the social or the academic performance of students. She suggested alternative strategies such as improving teacher quality and smaller classes as more promising options. She viewed the implementation of single-gender classrooms as a quick fix. Other opponents continued their argument on the basis that coeducation is more realistic of everyday and real life experiences. They believed that educating the sexes together makes the transition smoother as students move on to a mixed environment of employment and life in society.

Datnow and Hubbard (2008) suggested that not all researchers agree that single-gender education is beneficial for students and findings from studies performed are mixed. They mentioned that the separation of the genders did not guarantee positive performance, particularly for minority and poor students following studies at schools in New Zealand. They believed that the positive results regarding single-gender education was a result of the research that was conducted in catholic schools citing class and socioeconomic differences. Additionally, it has been noted that many believed that the practice of separating students by gender, and in some cases by race, has been criticized for depriving students' access to mainstream classes and programs. They also contended that the separating of genders, on some levels, constituted inequality and a disparity, particularly when the program targets certain racial, ethnic, and socioeconomic groups. Critics are concerned that it may send a message of segregation and inferiority.

The legality and ethics regarding the implementation of single-gender schools and classes have generated heated arguments between advocates and critics. Opponents of

single-gender classes stated that any type of segregation sends a negative message of inferiority and stereotypes which may be counterproductive for society. Single-gender schools and classes may further promote the abilities of one sex over the other and can encourage sexism, hence leading to the creation of an uneven playing field. If the success of single-gender education occurs, it more than likely would be due to additional factors like the caliber of faculty and students, level of parental involvement, small class sizes, and a well paid motivated staff. The differences within a particular gender are much greater than the actual difference between the sexes. Critics believed that the socioeconomic status and the education of the parents are the biggest predictors of student achievement. Cable and Spradlin (2008) were of the opinion that the funds should be invested in the training of teachers so as to improve the quality of instruction and designing coherent curriculum to meet the needs of all students.

Critics also stated that any optimistic results found regarding student academic achievement have come from students attending single-gender schools as opposed to participating in single-gender classrooms (Haag, 2001). The findings may be deceptive or questionable. Friend (2006) mentioned an investigation conducted on single-gender grouping for middle school science classes. There was no increase in academic achievement. It was also found that single-gender grouping did not enhance the learning environment.

> Most studies of single-sex schools have been undertaken either in private schools or overseas. Student characteristics vary considerably between private and public schools and between American students and those of other countries; consequently, policymakers cannot assume that the positive outcomes associated with single-sex education documented by research would be replicated among diverse public school populations. Data suggest that parents and students who choose single-sex schools are more motivated and achievement-oriented than average. Therefore, the higher achievement documented in single-sex schools

may be due to the nature of the students and families rather than the nature of the schools. Most single-sex schools have other attributes that correlate with higher academic achievement, such as a smaller student body, stronger emphasis on academics, and higher level of commitment to the school's mission. Consequently, the positive outcomes attributed to single-sex schools could be due to institutional factors other than the single-sex student body (National Association of State Boards of Education [NASBE], 2002, p. 1)

Teacher Influence on Student Achievement

Many place the responsibility on the teachers' ability to differentiate practices in order to appropriately address the needs of both male and female students. Sadker and Sadker (1994) noted that boys and girls often battle for teacher attention. Additionally, males are energetic while females are often contented to sit passively and assume the roles of observers. They also reported that boys, particularly White males, dominate the classroom, command and receive more attention; that teachers recompense aggressive behaviors in boys and rebuke the same behaviors in girls; and teachers are more likely to praise their male students for vigorous questioning and active participation. Teachers interact more with boys, as well and praise them for curiosity and other creative behaviors. Conversely, girls are rewarded for neatness, appearance, courteousness, conformity, acquiescence, and submission.

Reeves (2006) mentioned that quality teaching is one of the most significant factors in student school experience. It is an important influence on student performance and the level of comfort and engagement in the classroom. He described the distressing fact that usually the most competent and effective teachers are allotted to schools with economically advantaged students while impoverished students are denied.

Kommer (2006) believed that educators have overwhelmingly failed to address the social and the academic needs of both groups of students. He stated that there are

gender implications in the way the brain receives and uses information. He also believed

that parents and teachers must be aware of these differences and should work

collaboratively toward the creation of gender friendly classrooms. He added that the

quest is not to create classrooms that focus on one gender or the other, but to purposely

design learning environments so that some activities favor one gender's learning style

while some favor the other. Additionally, teachers must be more knowledgeable and

better equipped to address the needs of all students in the same classroom. Hubbard

(2005) found that the school experiences of students are a determining factor in whether

or not they will succeed academically.

Duhon (2001) cautioned of the importance of teacher influence on students.

"When students see their reflections in the eyes of teachers who have negative visions of

them, it is no wonder so many see themselves as headed for problems rather than

possibilities. The 'at-risk' label and resulting practices have been prevalent with urban

students" (p. 51). There is a need to change the dialogue about students being "at-risk" to

conversations about students "at-promise" Dedicated, competent, and caring teachers are

advocates of best practices that transform students from "at-risk" to resilient

and engaged.

While the demonstration of some degree of empathy is expected in their

interactions with students, it is imperative that teachers are capable of focusing on

academic content standards that are most important and will ensure student academic

achievement. Many belive that teachers are partially responsible for the poor academic

performance of students. Sommers (2000) stated, "And because we have allowed

ourselves to forget the central purpose of education, we have become overloaded with

well intentioned teachers who undervalue knowledge and learning and overvalue their role as healers, social reformers, and confidence builders" (p. 212).

Hoffman, Badgett and Parker (2008) placed the accountability on the shoulders of the individuals responsible for the delivery of instruction. They stated it is common knowledge that from preschool to high school, boys receive more attention from their teachers than girls do. Their 2 year study concentrated on the effectiveness of single-gender instruction on student achievement, instructional practices, teacher efficacy, student behavior, and classroom culture.

Martino, Mills, and Lingard (2005) examined the competency level of the teachers. "It is important to emphasize that the success of single-sex strategies and classes for boys, as with girls appears to be attributable to the significant impact of the teacher and not the strategy. In other words, it is the pedagogy that requires close attention" (p. 241). The authors discussed results of a research study that was conducted in 2002 at several schools that had implemented single-gender education. They made the comparison between single-gender and coed classes. Focus groups of students in single-gender English and algebra classes were compared with coeducational students. Assessments grades, standardized test scores, classroom observations, record of suspensions, occurrence of infractions, teacher interviews, and surveys were all sources of data. The results were inconsistent, with gains shifting between both groups. However, standardized test results indicated superior performance for the coed students. One noticeable difference was that the single-gender classes provided a more supportive learning environment for female students. They participated more and were more

comfortable taking risks. Teachers believed that the environment of the single-gender classes was more conducive to learning.

King and Gurian (2004) shared the following points and believed that through the incorporation of new theories from gender science into classroom practice, teachers can close gender gaps and significantly improve learning. They believed that in order to bring about these improvements, teachers need to ask themselves some key questions.

1) As teachers, do we fully understand the challenges that boys face in education today?
2) Do we realize that there is a scientific basis for innovating on behalf of both girls and boys as disaggregated groups?
3) Does my school incorporate boy-friendly and girl-friendly learning innovations in full knowledge of how essential they are in accommodating the structural and chemical gender differences built into the human brain?
4) Do educators in my school realize that many behaviors typical of either boys or girls are neurologically based? (p. 60)

Kommer (2006) suggested,

The first thing is to become aware of the differences between genders. Once these differences are explained and accepted, educators must be proactive in the way that boys and girls are treated in schools. This is not a call for separate schools for we do not live in a gender-segregated world. Indeed there are distinct advantages to educating boys and girls together appropriately, for in doing so, each gender will begin to see how each other thinks, feels, responds, and reacts. Such understanding is in itself a major goal for gender-friendly classrooms. (p. 248)

The debate regarding the merits and drawbacks of single-gender education continues as the trend becomes more popular. With benefits that some believe range from social development to academic success, it is no wonder that there has been a major revitalization in the single-gender movement in recent years. Additionally, with the level of accountability and implications that have been placed on schools, innovative educators have been on a quest to employ strategies and programs that will positively influence student performance both academically and socially.

Many schools are attuned with the educational as well as the societal needs of the communities in which they are located. Single-gender opportunities for females have always been popular with parents despite the fact that it was not always based upon assessment or merit. With growing concern regarding the performance of boys and the attempt to close the gap between the sexes, community interest in opportunities for single-gender schools and classes will increase.

Gender Equity

In an attempt to close the gender achievement gap, gender equity has become a main concern for educators. The major challenge for educators is to implement a curriculum and a set of courses that establish second order change, which will consequently reflect the perspectives of all students. The goal of teachers and administrators is to ensure that all students receive opportunities to learn and develop as individuals and to surpass expectations. It is no longer acceptable to minimize students' expectations regarding interests, abilities, and skills. Duhon (2001) cautioned, "Today we must teach equality in the classroom. Without equity in schools, students will not experience true educational excellence" (p. 18).

There is a need for equitable education for both genders. For schools that are considering the implementation of single-gender classes, it is imperative that the initiative is implemented for the right reasons. Both sexes should receive impartial opportunities to participate in all areas of interest. The goal is to eliminate roadblocks by providing all students with effective and meaningful learning experiences.

Brain-Based Research on Boys and Girls

Medin and Medin (2005) explained, "Although old ideas about essential biological differences between males and females are no longer credible as ways to explain differences in achievement by boys and girls, biology cannot be entirely ruled out"(p.11). One philosophy which provides reasoning behind single-gender schooling is that boys and girls have specific biological differences that profoundly affect the learning of each gender. Friend (2006 b) believed that in many cases society handles the educational needs of both genders in a biased manner. While the author did not believe that the educational system is deliberately set against males or females, there is agreement that our educational system fails to differentiate and fulfill the specific needs of each gender. When Magnetic Resonance Imaging (MRI) and other technological devices are used to examine the brains of both genders, structural and functional differences are quite obvious. These gender differences have a profound effect on learning.

Sax (2005) noted,

The evidence for the success in single-sex schools includes a number of factors, some related to new information emerging in the area of brain research.The brains of girls and boys differ in important way, and these differences are genetically programmed and present at birth. (p. 18)

As depicted in Appendix A, further research in the areas of gender and education reveals a major disparity between the learning brains of both male and female genders and the way that they are taught in schools. The following are some characteristics of the brain of a female: A girl's corpus callosum is on average up to 25 % larger than a boy's, thus supporting more "cross talk" between the hemispheres. Girls have more powerful neural connectors in their temporal lobes. In other words, they have

more detailed memory storage, better listening skills, and a stronger ability to distinguish voice tones. This leads to greater use of supporting details. The hippocampus is also larger which gives girls an advantage in language arts. The prefrontal cortex is generally more active than boys' and develops earlier than that of their male counterparts. This, coupled with the fact that girls have more serotonin in the bloodstream and brain allows them to be less impulsive than boys.

Finally, girls usually utilize more cortical areas of the brain for emotive and verbal functioning. With many more areas devoted to memory this allows them to accomplish the following with less effort than their male counterpart: focusing, listening, practicint tonality, accomplishing mental cross talk, sitting still, reading, and writing. Additionally, with 15 % more blood flow entering the brain, the female brain has the ability to drive itself toward stimulants that are affiliated with mental activities. Due to the fact that the majority of the cortical areas are used for verbal and emotive functioning, the female brain does not posses the ability to activate cortical areas for abstract and physical-spatial functions, which primarily deals with mechanical concepts. That is probably why more males are interested in areas related to physics, engineering, and the sciences.

Gurian and Stevens (2004) contended that the brains of boys have the ability to recharge and reorient by entering a "rest state," hence boys may fall asleep during a lesson, fidget as they attempt to stay awake, and often appear to drift away or zone out. The male brain is geared toward an interest in symbols, diagrams, pictures, and objects instead of continuous words. In addition to having less blood flow in their brain, males lateralize brain activity and are more likely to refrain from multitasking. They may

experience more issues relating to attention span. As a result of having less serotonin and oxitocin than females, it is possible that boys will be less likely to overcome their impulsiveness. Hence the reason why they are more interested in math and physics as opposed to the other subjects. They are also inclined to be more interested in video games that involve movement. The author further stated that boys are failing in schools and girls are only negligibly behind them in math, science, and areas which they have always dominated.

As shown in Appendices B and C, brain-based educational research also reveals that young men and women learn differently. Boys and girls differ in brain development, structure, and function at this age, as well as in their social maturation. It is imperative that educators and parents use the data regarding the knowledge of gendered brains of children and form a collaborative effort to implement strategies geared toward meeting the needs of both sexes. (Gurian & Stevens, 2005).

Self-Efficacy Theory

Bandura (1997) defined self-efficacy as the belief that one is capable of performing in a certain manner to accomplish certain goals. It is a belief that one has the capabilities to execute the courses of actions necessary to manage prospective situations. The idea of self-efficacy is one of the critical points in positive psychology. This component of psychology focuses on elements that create meaning for individuals. Through self-reflection, individuals make sense of their experiences, are capable of investigating their cognition and self-beliefs, engage in self-evaluation, and adjust their behavior and thinking.

Heidenreich (1971) supported this notion. "A child's self-concept, what he thinks

of himself, has an important influence on his ability to learn in the school situation"

(p. 211). Bandura (1986) also emphasized that self-efficacy beliefs provide the

foundation for human motivation, personal welfare, and the accomplishment of goals.

This is due to the fact that unless individuals believe that their actions can produce the

outcomes they desire, they have little incentive to act or to persevere as they are faced

with challenges and obstacles. According to Bandura, self-regulation strongly depends on

self-efficacy beliefs. In other words, self-efficacy greatly influences the level of goals that

individuals set for themselves, the extent of their efforts, and their persistence and

determination. Perceived self-efficacy is theorized to influence performance

accomplishments both directly and indirectly. A student's self-efficacy is an effective

predictor of motivation and achievement. (Zimmerman, 2000).

Peer and McClendon (2002) supported Bandura's theory by stating that

educational activities should promote self-efficacy through social interaction. By doing

so, the learning environment is structured to de-emphasize competition and highlight

self-comparison of progress to create a sense of self-efficacy and promote

academic achievement.

According to Staples, Hullan, and Higgins (1998), self-efficacy theory suggests

that there are four major sources of information used by individuals when developing

self-efficacy judgements.

1. Performance accomplishments: personal assessment information that is based

   on an individual's personal accomplishment. Previous successes raise mastery

   expectations, while repeated failures lower them.

2. Vicarious experience: gained by observing others perform activities successfully. This is often referred to as modeling, and it can generate expectations in observers that they can improve their own performance by learning from what they have observed.

3. Social persuasion: activities where people are led, through suggestion, into believing that they can cope successfully with specific tasks. Coaching and giving evaluative feedback on performance are common types of social persuasion.

4. Physiological and emotional states: The individual's physiological or emotional states influence self-efficacy judgements with respect to specific tasks. Emotional reactions to such tasks (e.g., anxiety) can lead to negative judgements of one's ability to complete the tasks.

Gender Differences in Self-Efficacy Beliefs

The concept of self-efficacy has been investigated in order to provide clarity regarding gender differences in the areas of motivation, performance, and achievement of goals and aspirations. Much of this research has focused on academic areas that are traditionally sex-typed as male or female domains of achievement. For example, numerous studies suggest that boys are inclined to report higher self-efficacy and expectancy beliefs than girls about their performance in math and science. When the context was reading or composing, gender differences were reversed. For example, Pajares and Valiante (1997) found that middle school girls had higher composing self-efficacy than boys, even though there were no gender differences in actual composing performance.

Parental Influence

Since students with involved parents tend to have few problems in school, most parental contact with the school stems from parents whose children are doing well academically and exhibit minimal discipline problems. The parents least likely to become inolved are those whose children experience difficulties. As a result, the students who require the most intense collaboration often never receive it. Olsen and Fuller (2003) agreed, "Students with involved parents are much less likely than those with noninvolved parents to have problems in school. Students whose parents are uninvolved are twice as likely as those with involved parents to have problems in school" (p. 202).

Middle schools are usually based on a student-centered concept. It is a team approach and parent involvement is an extension of the team concept. Parental involvement declines considerably as children enter the middle grades. These are developmentally sensitive years and family and parental involvement in the educational process has a profound effect on students' behavior, engagement in school, level of comfort, academic achievement, and relationships with others.

Murray (2008) advised, "Parents and educators alike should be rooting for children to shoot for the stars and telling them to find their own" (p. 168). Parents, educators, and the community at large bear much of the blame for the disconnect and disengagement that students encounter. It is not sufficient to simply wish children well. It is the obligation of the adults to facilitate their journey through their academic and social emotional growth and developoment.

Eccles, Adler and Meece (1984) expanded the expectancy-value form encompassing the parental socialization component. According to this form, there are

several important pathways by which parents leverage their children's achievement motivation. Parents are important sources of information young children draw on to pattern their ability and value perceptions. Parents also supply and encourage distinct recreational and learning activities that can support the development of specific skills and interests. Additionally, parents are important function models. They communicate information about their own abilities and skills, and what is valued and important through their alternative of work and leisure activities. Parental beliefs about their children's abilities have strong leverage on their children's own beliefs about their academic abilities.

Parental engagement in children's activities has also been discovered to differentially affect girls' and boys' alternative of activities. For example, in the study of single-parent families, the amount of time mothers engaged in supportive activities with their young children was positively related to their children's creative leisure activity throughout adolescence (Larson, Dworkin, & Gillman, 2001). Researchers have also discovered significant links between parents' gender stereotypes, children's gender stereotypes, and children's activity choice. In the 2-year study of middle class girls and their parents, McHale, Shanahan, Updegraff, Crouter, and Booth (2004) investigated the amount of time girls spent in sex-typed leisure activities throughout middle childhood and adolescence. The researchers discovered that the more sex-typed beliefs parents and girls held, the more the girls were engaged in sex-typed activities. Interestingly, while the parents' personality qualities (e.g., kindness and competitiveness) were strong predictors of girls' sex-typed activity, parental gender function attitudes were not. In addition, the mothers' personality qualities best forecast the sex-typed activities in middle childhood,

41

while the fathers' qualities best forecast sex-typed activities in adolescence. This latter

finding suggests that the paternal function ties young children to the outside world and

becomes more important as the young children age. Parental leverage not only affects

children's alternative of activities and achievement beliefs but also impacts children's

career interests and choices. Duhon (2001) postulated,

> Adolescence marks the trying period of search which may have significant effects
> on subsequent personality structure, and on later adjustments in the years that lie
> ahead. Probably, what brings the greatest amount of equalizing balance to the
> period of adolescence is the presence of significant people in the adloscent's life.
> Since people become so very important to an adolescent, it is the importance of
> those people who posses that special ingredient of compassion, who can help the
> adlescent come through this unfolding, transitional period into the fullness of
> adult life. (p. 258)

Bender, Leone, Szumski, and Shein (1998) identified poverty as one of the key

reasons for the lack of parental involvement. "Statistics show that poverty rates in the

United States are much higher among certain groups than the population as a whole"

(p. 73). The growth of poor female-headed families is indeed a troubling development in

certain regards, most significantly is that it creates increased risks for children regarding

the acquisition of an education. Paternal disinvestment also plays a critical role in the

demise of the value of education for children. The authors cautioned that for boys, the

most socially acute manifestation of paternal disinvestment is juvenile violence. For girls,

it is out of wedlock child bearing.

Community Socio-Economics

Heidenreich (1971) discussed the fact that children in disadvantaged

neighborhoods start school with an initial handicap point. Urban schools have been

failing disadvantaged students for decades. The circumstances of the community in which

the school is located is a contributing factor in the intricate system of influences that

determine opportunity and life chance, rather than the simple and direct causative agent it is often taken to be.

Miller and Woock (1970) supported the notion that there is a correlation between community demographics and the quality of schooling that students are provided with. "Schooling is a factor, however, whether one sees it as the main, or only a contributing one; and whatever the larger society may do to improve opportunities must be accompanied by efforts to equalize school success for minority groups" (p. 22).

During the 1970s, educators began the dialogue about 'at risk' students, but still have not completely agreed on an exact definition of the term. While 'at risk' may include students with physical or emotional handicaps or special individual needs, 'at risk' has come to focus mainly on deprived students from poor single-parent homes in delapidated communities. McCarney and Bauer (1991) provided a definition of 'At Risk':

> At risk means different things to different people. To the teacher, 'At-Risk' may mean the student is 'At-Risk' for failure which will result in retention at the end of the school year. To the social worker, 'At-Risk' may mean that an abused child is 'At-Risk' for becoming an abusive parent. To the social or economic analyst, an 'At-Risk'child is one who is born out of wedlock, grows up in poverty and is likely to repeat the cycle. (p. 3)

Noguera (2003) explained that urban schools are profoundly affected by the social environment in which they are located. Given the abundance of unmotivated and unprepared students, dysfunctional and distressed families, unresponsive and incompetent administrators and teachers, and most of all, misguided and foolhard politicians, there is no shortage of compelling excuses for the persistent failure in urban schools. Hence, it is quite difficult to reverse negative trends and change things to improve the grim reality of urban schools. Poverty magnifies all risk factors associated with success in education. As

43

income goes down, so does academic achievement. When income goes up, so does academic achievement (Kunjufu, 2006).

Children who exist in a culture dominated by crime and poverty are very often marginal, helpless, and hopeless; hence the reasons for their dismal performance on state and district assessments, a plethora of disciplinary infractions, and a pedagogical disconnect. Miller and Woock (1970) stated, "On the individual level the culture of poverty is characterized by psychological feelings of marginality, helplessness, dependence, and despair" (p. 54).

Elliott (1994) agreed that the cost of poverty to society in general is astronomical, as evidenced by higher taxes to support social services, money to provide health care for the indigent, unemployment compensation, and penal institutions, street crime, homelessness, domestic violence, child neglect, and a culture of drug and gang violence. Consequently funding for education, after school programs, and extracurricular activities are often depleted for schools in urban communities where these issues are prevalent. Additionally, in crime ridden communities, one cannot rationally expect students who are afraid to leave their homes because of the gangs that roam the halls of many urban housing projects to have the same confidence, trust, preparedness, and attitude as their surburban counterparts.

Conclusion

There are several reasons and causes for students' academic disconnect and failure to succeed in school. As initiatives and programs are implemented, it is critical that decision makers are cognizant of the issues and challenges that students face. These include the lack of parental involvement and influence, socioeconomics, peer pressure,

and community dynamics. These factors may have a profound effect on students. Pollard (1999) concurred, "While the need for more research on single-sex classes is clear, it is also important for such research to take into account differences in goals and implementation when considering the outcomes of these classes" (p. 3). The only consensus that can be reached in regard to single-gender education is that the educational community needs more thorough research upon which to offer valid recommendations. It is obvious that the topic of single-gender education demands further research. Initial steps must be taken to meticulously look at the implementation of single-gender education settings and the goals that have been established for them. It is also important to examine the demographics of the students involved, their attitude, perception and self-efficacy as well as their choice of participating in the settings. One essential aspect that needs further research is the teacher training, interest, perception, and attitude toward the initiative.

Chapter 3: Methodology

Introduction

Educators, parents, and school administrators continuously grapple with issues regarding the academic performance and the attitude of middle school students, particularly as schools are faced with rigorous state and federal mandates regarding student performance. Romano and Georgiady (1994) discussed the urgency for middle schools to work on promoting the social skills of students as they approach young adulthood. They believed that schools are obligated to implement programs and best practices which will develop the students' sense of self. Kohn (1991) also expressed concern that schools have failed to implement programs and curriculum that incorporate student-to-student interaction.

Essential data regarding the achievement of middle school students in urban schools indicates a major decline in the academic performance along with an increased amount of discipline issues.When students are plagued with challenges, they become frustrated, disengaged, and unmotivated. Subsequently they are unable to perform well on assessments. The school as well as the community ultimately suffer when residents or stakeholders are unproductive, disconnected, and illiterate. Chenoweth (2009) examined the collaborative efforts between Clark University and the Worcester, Massachusetts School Community. Clark officials realized that the quality of schools in a neighborhood affects whether families were willing to live there.

It is not known to what degree single-gender classes impact the level of engagement and performance, self-efficacy, relationship with peers and teachers, and

46

behavior of urban middle school students. The purpose of this study was to delve into the impact that participation in single-gender classes had on middle school students. There was a direct correlation between students' behavior, self-efficacy, level of comfort, ability to maintain healthy relationships with peers and teachers, and academic engagement and performance. The findings were used as a basis to encourage further exploration and possible expansion of single-gender education programs in urban middle schools.

In an attempt to understand the many variables that influence students' ability to prosper academically, many qualitative and quantitative studies have been conducted on the attitudes and behaviors of junior high school students. Improved levels of comfort with the school and classroom setting, respectful relationships with teachers and peers, self-efficacy and increased levels of academic engagement as measured by their academic achievement were also intended outcomes. There is minimal research to date that demonstrates how single-gender education impacts middle-school students. A more comprehensive research study is needed to study the implementation of this initiative and its impact on urban middle school students.

Research Questions

The following research questions, which guided this study, were chosen by the researcher.

1. How did participating in single-gender classes impact the academic engagement and performance of middle school students in an urban setting?

2. How did participating in single-gender classes influence the behavior of middle school students in an urban setting?

3. How did participating in single-gender classes affect the self-efficacy of middle school students in an urban setting?

4. How did teachers align their teaching practices and pedagogy to accommodate single-gender classes?

5. How did my leadership practice as a principal influence the successful implementation of single-gender classes in an urban setting?

Research Design

Creswell (2007) recognized that data collection and analysis by means of multiple approaches are rigorous and time-consuming, but necessary for viable data collection and analysis. Vin (2003) explained the importance of research design and supported his view with the following statement, "The design is the logical sequence that connects the empirical data to a study's initial research questions and ultimately, to its conclusions" (p. 20).

The purpose of this action research study was to investigate and implement a programmatic initiative that explored the impact of single-gender education on middle school students in an urban school. Glesne (2006) described action research "as a way to improve practice" (p. 17). This may result in improved student behavior and the strengthening of student self-efficacy. Additional progress may also be made in the areas of classroom management, student engagement, the fostering of meaningful relationships, collaboration among stakeholders, and ultimately improved student achievement.

The challenge was to base practice on rigorous evidence that specific programs will work to guide teaching and learning and, at the same time, to understand the reality that this type of research is not readily available or understood by most administrators

and classroom teachers. This challenge included finding new opportunities for educators, policymakers, and researchers to work together on behalf of urban middle school students where disengagement and dismal performance on state and district assessments were systematic. The study instilled hope that single-gender education classes would provide better direction and evidence that student achievement can improve.

Several cycles of action research were pursued. According to Glesne (2006),

> Information is first gathered through qualitative and sometimes quantitative means. During the reflection phase, the data are interpreted and the multiple viewpoints are communicated and discussed among those with a stake in the process. This is followed by the action phase which involves planning, implementation, and evaluation. (p. 17)

Additionally, teachers completed an Employee Satisfaction Survey to compile data that could be used to analyze the effectiveness of the leadership of the organization. Since Likert-type questions deal with the attitudes of respondents, interesting data about their attitudes and perceptions were gathered. Patten (200l) agreed that Likert-type questions or forced choice responses normally provide useful and uncomplicated methods of obtaining data on attitudes.

To effectively measure the perception and potential actions of students as they pertained to their experience prior to and following their participation in single-gender classroom settings, the data gathered from the Likert-type questions were carefully analyzed. In several of the questions, students were given five choices which included, strongly agree, agree, disagree, and strongly disagree. Neutral was included as a choice because without the ability to choose neutral, respondents who were undecided upon a particular response may become frustrated and subsequently refrain from participating in the research study. Patten (2001) supported this decision, "On the other hand, the absence

of a middle position may be frustrating to respondents who truly are neutral" (p. 35). An attitude scale was created in order to obtain a total score for each of the items.

Data Collection Strategies

In order to conduct this investigation, approval was obtained from the district's and the university's Institutional Review Boards (IRB). Since subjects were minors, written permission was provided by their parents or guardians. Students whose parents did not provide written approval were not included in the study. Slavin (1992) cautioned, "The most important tasks are to be sure that the measures being used are reliable and valid, and to be sure that the individuals from whom we receive surveys are representative to whom we wish the results to apply" (p. 62).

A mixed method was implemented and determined to be most appropriate for this research study. Mixed method design involves more than simply collecting and analyzing both kinds of data; it also involves the use of both approaches in tandem so that the overall strength of a study is greater than either qualitative or quantitative research alone. The basis for employing these designs are likewise varied, but they can be generally described as methods to expand the scope or breadth of research to offset the weaknesses of either approach alone (Blake 1989; Greene, Caracelli, & Graham, 1989: Rossman & Wilson, 1989). In other words, it is utilized to reduce or nullify biases inherent in any single approach. Both qualitative and quantitative methods were employed for this study. The application of mixed methods has been found to provide greater insight into a problem than either qualitative or quantitative methods alone can address. Creswell (2009) defined mixed methods research as "an approach to inquiry that combines or associates both qualitative and quantitative forms" (p. 4).

Quantitative Data

Quantitative research can be defined as the systematic empirical investigation of quantitative properties and their phenomena and relationships. Its technique involves using numbers or anything that is measurable. Data are reduced to quantifiable pieces of information which are statistically analyzed so that generalizations may be made.

Frequency tables and percentages are used to present the results of this type of research. Glesne (2006) added that quantitative approaches generally begin with a theory about the phenomena in question. In this particular instance, research shows that in many urban areas, as students transition to middle school, there is a major decline in their level of academic engagement and achievement. Chenoweth (2009) agreed by stating "Among educators, middle school is known as the hardest level" (p. 175).

In order to conduct meaningful quantitative research, a student survey was created. The student presurvey and postsurvey consisted of approximately 24 Likert-type questions which students responded to via written communication. Parents and teachers also responded to surveys.

Surveys were used in order to gather information on phenomena that could not be observed. They were an efficient way to collect data. Additionally, surveys yielded responses that were easily tabulated and analyzed. Because surveys were administered anonymously, they were extremely useful for collecting data on sensitive matters. When respondents are aware that their responses are anonymous, they are more likely to be candid, open, and truthful. Merriam (1998) mentioned one of the advantages of utilizing surveys. "One of the greatest advantages in using documentary material is its stability. Unlike interviewing and observation, the presence of the investigator does not alter what

is being studied" (p. 126).

Patten (2001) cautioned researchers against asking more than one question in a single item and to avoid ambiguity. These errors only serve to confuse respondents and discourage them from completing the survey. When surveys are well designed and comprehensible, valuable data can be gathered on a population at a particular point and time. With the presurveys and postsurveys (Appendix D), that were administered to the students in this study, the researcher was able to gain pertinent information regarding their perceptions and attitudes prior to participating in single-gender education classes as well as their feelings following a year of experience in a single-gender setting. Parents and teachers also responded to a Likert-type survey following students' participation in single-gender class: Teacher Survey in Appendix E, Parent Survey in Appendix F. In order to gather pertinent data regarding the leadership of Hopeville Community School, an Employee Satisfaction Survey in Appendix G was completed by the middle school teachers at the site.

Qualitative Data

Creswell (2007) mentioned that qualitative research begins with philosophical assumptions that researchers make in deciding to conduct a qualitative study. After making a comparison between qualitative and quantitative research, Glesne (2006) arrived at the following conclusion. "Qualitative researchers in contrast, seek to understand and interpret how various participants in a social setting construct the world around them" (p. 4). Qualitative methods are helpful not only in giving rich explanations of complex phenomena, but in creating or evolving theories or conceptual bases, and in proposing hypotheses to clarify the phenomena.

The value of qualitative research consists in validity of the information received; participants are interviewed so the data obtained is taken as accurate and credible accounts of their opinions and experiences. Qualitative research tries to answer a given question by focusing on the local population it affects and gathering perspectives and insight by conducting interviews. It is also known as observational research because of the focus on observing and analyzing people rather than gathering quantitative data. During this research study, qualitative research was conducted in the form of observations and interviews with students, teachers, and parents.

Observations. One component of the study involved monitoring daily behaviors of middle-school students in the classrooms, during extracurricular activities, in the cafeteria, in the halls, and during activity classes. Their interactions with school personnel, parent volunteers, peers, and other stakeholders in the school community were also observed. This allowed for the identification and notation of some of the issues and concerns that existed. It also permitted me to be more cognizant of specific behaviors and attitudes.

Gall, Gall, and Borg (2005) explained, "Direct observation involves gathering 'live' data about individuals as the behavior occurs" (p. 181). The authors also stated that observations are more objective and purposeful than surveys and interviews because they do not rely on self reports prepared by participants in the study. Since I was interested in all aspects of student behavior as they pertained to their participation in single-gender classes, the conducting of direct observation was extremely critical.

Punch (2009) remarked, "In naturalistic observation, observers neither manipulate nor stimulate the behavior of those whom they are observing" (p. 154). Additionally,

quality time was spent with the participants in an unobtrusive manner. The qualitative research involved hours of intense observation of the behaviors of participants.

My role in the study was that of an action researcher with all others as informed participants who were aware of my role and intentions. Glesne (2006) found that qualitative research called for the researcher to be an essential element of the research, it was imperative that trust was established. This was obtained by building relationships with all parties involved by means of informal conversations as rapport was developed. During this study, my presence was as unobtrusive as possible and extra precaution was taken so as not to influence the behaviors of participants.

It was also vital that I refrained from demonstrating the traits of an expert or authority but acted as a good listener and an attentive learner. Flexibility, preparedness, consideration, and the ability to be well informed about the normal attire, values, and practices of the participants and stakeholders in the setting were also quite beneficial as efforts were made to fit in with local behavioral norms.

During observations, data were recorded in the form of handwritten field notes as well as the utilizing of technological devices. Hinchey (2008) postulates, "To determine reliable answers to research questions, researchers must make careful decisions about what kind, and how much, data to collect" (p. 74).

Fieldnotes. Bogdan and Biklen (2007) described fieldnotes as "the written account of what the researcher hears, sees, experiences, and thinks, in the course of collecting and reflecting on the data in a qualitative study" (p. 118). Fieldnotes allow the researcher to access the subject and record what they observe in an unobtrusive manner. Fieldnotes refer to transcribed notes or the written account derived from data collected

during observations and interviews. There are many styles of fieldnotes, but all fieldnotes generally consist of two parts: descriptive in which the observer attempts to capture a word-picture of the setting, actions, and conversations; and reflective in which the observer records thoughts, ideas, questions, and concerns based on the observations and interviews. During the research, fieldnotes were central to participant observation. Details of conversations, people, places, interactions, activities, objects, behaviors, and other events were recorded in a spiral bound notebook. Notes were clarified and expanded upon at the end of each observation.

Glesne (2006) advised, "Check your fieldnotes for vague adjectives such as *many* or *some* and replace them with more descriptive words" (p. 57). Descriptive means providing enough detail so the reader does not have to speculate what the writer means or supply a great deal of additional information to interpret the description. Fieldnotes are one means employed by qualitative researchers whose main objective of any research is to try and understand the true perspectives of the subject being studied.

Interviews. Bogdan and Biklen (2007) discussed one of the many advantages of conducting interviews during research. "Good interviews produce rich data filled with words that reveal the respondents' perspectives" (p. 104). As interviews were conducted, respondents were gently probed and were expected to be focused and engaging. However, since young participants were involved, it was more like a conversation than a highly structured interchange between the respondents and me. Bogdan and Biklen also emphasized the importance of listening carefully since every word may potentially lead to the subjects' perception. Instead of challenging participants, researchers should question for clarity or elaborate.

Another strategy implemented during this study was the my decision to share personal experiences with the participants. According to Glesne (2006), this was an excellent way to develop rapport and gain serendipitous learnings that emerged from discussions and conversations with respondents. The type of interview selected was aligned with the strategy, purpose of the study, and the research questions. Punch (2009) observed,

> The interview is the most prominent data collection tool in qualitative research. It is a very good way of accessing people's perceptions, meanings, definitions of situations and constructions of reality. It is also one of the most powerful ways we can understand others. (p. 144)

Participants were interviewed one at a time. One-on-one interviews revealed the most accurate perception of the individual participant without the drawbacks of group dynamics. In a typical focus group, a small percentage of the participants do the majority of the talking. Even if a skilled moderator can help smooth out this imbalance, it is virtually impossible to prevent group-think bias from setting in as a result of a few individuals monopolizing the conversations (Wiersma & Jurs, 2005).

During individual interviews, students were given the chance to speak openly and candidly regarding their personal views and experiences in a single-gender class environment. All participants received the same questions, in the same sequence as depicted in the Student Interview Protocol in Appendix H. Merriam (1998) advised, "A researcher may feel more confident with a format where most if not all the questions were written out ahead of time" (p. 82). Working from an interview schedule allowed me to gain the experience and confidence needed to conduct more open-ended questioning. This was particularly beneficial in this study due to the fact that there was a considerable

56

number of respondents. With the permission of each participant, interviews were electronically recorded and later transcribed.

Merriam (1998) also advised researchers to implement a less structured interviewing format by choosing more open-ended questions. This choice provided more opportunities for the individual conducting the research to gently probe respondents and encourage them to be candid and open. When researchers demonstrate flexibility and questions are uncomplicated, they are more likely to stay on topic and extract the rich information that is desired. During the interviews "yes and no" responses were avoided since they provided no information, hence, students were asked to provide explanations and descriptions to support their responses. Additionally, for the reluctant respondent, it was an easy way out to avoid a more comprehensive response. Bogdan and Biklen (2007) supported this choice. "People being interviewed have a tendency to offer quick runthrough of events. Informants can be taught to respond to meet the interviewer's interest in the particulars, the details. They need encouragement to elaborate" (p. 107).

Document Collection

Merriam (1998) supported the use of documents in the data collecting process. "Using documentary material as data is not much different from using interviews or observations" (p. 120). Since the study of the impact of single-gender classes on middle school students dealt with the behavior, perceptions, and performance of students, documents such as student performance on the New Jersey Assessment of Skills and Knowledge (NJ ASK) as shown in Appendix I was gathered. The New Jersey Core Curriculum Content Standards (NJCCCS) determine what students should know and be able to do at the end of each grade. State tests evaluate whether or not students are

acquiring the proficiency and knowledge necessary for success. The state first

administered tests to elementary school students in May 1997. Following 2 years of field

testing, the Elementary School Proficiency Assessment (ESPA) was administered

officially in 1999, 2000, 2001, and 2002 to all fourth-grade students in New Jersey public

schools. In 2003, the state replaced ESPA with the NJ ASK. This change resulted from

the federal requirements of the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB), which

requires all states to provide a method of assessment for every student in grade 3 through

grade 8. It also supports New Jersey's Early Literacy Initiative, the goal of which is, by

the year 2014, all third-grade students to be able to read on grade level by the end of

grade 3. The performance of participants on the NJASK has been provided in Appendix I.

Additionally, records containing the behavior of students were gathered

throughout the study. I obtained documentation on the number of onsite and out of

school suspensions with a description of each infraction. These were referred to as

Discipline Atoms (Tables 11 & 12 in Appendcies J & K). At the site, they were prepared

by the disciplinarian or building administrators and submitted to the office of the district

superintendent on a monthly basis.

Punch (2009) contended, "in conjunction with other data, documents can be

important in triangulation, where an intersecting set of different methods and data types

are used in a single project" (p. 159). Since the study also examined student academic

performance and behavior, I was able to retrieve academic performance data and test

scores of all middle school students who participated in the study. Glense (2006) added,

"Documents corroborate your observations and interviews and thus make your findings

more trustworthy" (p. 5).

Setting

      Hopeville Community School was a large K-8 urban, inner-city public school. The student population was approximately 638 and fluctuates because of the high mobility rate of the students and their families. According to the school profile, the majority of the students live in the neighboring housing developments. By definition, it was considered a high poverty school. The school was classified in District Factor Grouping (DFG) A, meaning that because of the socioeconomic factors, 96% of the students qualify for free and reduced meals.

      There were approximately 109 female students and 83 males for a total of 192 middle school students in grades 6-8. The demographics for Hopeville Community School revealed that 99% of the students were of African American decent and 1% hispanic. The 10 middle school classes each contained approximately 19 students. The 15 middle school instructional staff consisted of both male and female teachers who were responsible for the delivery of instruction for both male and female groups. Out of the 15 middle school teachers, 5% obtained graduate degrees in their specific content areas. As a result of the instability of the district, and the frequency of crime and violence in the surrounding neighborhood, it was a challenge to attract and retain a dedicated staff. Consequently, the staff mobility rate was high due to those factors. Two of the middle school teachers were nontenured and the remaining 13 had been there for approximately 5 years. Despite the fact that the school was considered a dumping ground and many teachers viewed their assignment at the school as punitive, the majority of them remained hopeful that they could make a difference in the lives of students and ultimately transform Hopeville into a school that was high performing.

Community Demographics

Conditions which contributed to placing the area at risk were at a critically high level. Poverty remains a consistent problem in the community, despite its revitalization in recent years. The 1967 riots resulted in a significant population loss of both White and Black middle classes, which continued from the 1970s through to the 1990s. The city lost over 100,000 residents between 1960 and 1990.

According to numbers retrieved from the 2003 Census, the annual median income for a household in the city is $26,913, and the median income for a family is $30,781. Males have an annual median income of $29,748 versus $25,734 for females. The per capita income of the city is $13,009. Approximately 25.5 % of the households are below the poverty level and 72 % of the households are led by single mothers, many of whom are unemployed. The city's unemployment rate is 22% (U.S. Census Bureau, 2004). Amato and Booth (1997) postulated on the effects that the socio economic status may have on children. "Economic strain makes life difficult in many ways for children, and previous studies have amply documented the toll that poverty takes on children's psychological and behavioral adjustment" (p. 206).

Because of the high crime rate and pervasive violence, the community is considered unsafe and dangerous. The day-to-day life experiences of students include exposure to crime, violence, drugs, abuse, neglect, and constant family mayhem. The district where Hopeville is located is identified as the unsafest part of the city. The area is a haven for stolen cars, abandoned vehicles, and dilapidated buildings. Vandalism and car jackings are rampant, and the neighborhood holds the record for the highest number of homicides in the city. The students at Hopeville have openly expressed their fear of the

community and are quite apprehensive to venture out of their homes even to attend school. Gangs continue to be a widespread force in the neighborhood and the majority of the students report at least one encounter or affiliation with neighborhood gangs.

Participants

As the accessible population was determined, a simple random sample was utilized in this research study. It can be described as a subset of a statistical population in which each member has an equal probability of being chosen. The utilization of a simple random sample was meant to be an unbiased representation of a group. According to Patten (2001), this is obtained by giving each member of the population an equal opportunity to be selected (p. 74). The concept of purposeful sampling was also used in this qualitative research. Creswell (2007) explained, "This means that the inquirer selects individuals and sites for study because they can purposefully inform an understanding of the research problem and central phenomenon in the study" (p. 125).

The group of participants consisted of 21 female and 21 male students from grades 6, 7, and 8. Single-gender classes were implemented throughout the entire middle school cohort and there were no coed classes. The names of all male students were placed in a jar and pieces of paper containing the names were selected. The same protocol was followed for the female students. Subsequently, since participants were minors, it was imperative that their parents and guardians provided written permission for them to participate in the study. Subjects ranged from the ages of 11 to 15 years old. Because the student body at Hopeville was predominantly African American, with the exception of one Latino, all participants were of African American decent.

Participants viewed the school as a safe haven and were cognizant of the good

intentions of many of their teachers. They were also acutely aware of the fact that many

of their relatives and older siblings were unable to find jobs and continued to live in

poverty; nevertheless they believed that the acquisition of a high school diploma was the

key to success. Since many had little interest in pursuing a college degree, the prospect of

becoming rappers, basketball or football players and entertainers appeared more viable

than the pursuit of academia. It was quite apparent that regardless of their aspirations and

future prospects, a large number of them were unmotivated and unenthused by the

educational process. Greene (2002) supported these findings, "Millions of children are

not functioning in school at a level commensurate with their true ability. The

consequences are also self-evident: damaged academic self-confidence, diminished

expectations and aspirations, and wasted human talent" (p. 144).

A total of 24 parents of middle school students responded to the parent surveys

and 12 agreed to be interviewed. Approximately 50 % of them were unemployed and felt

that the education system had failed them when they were students. However, they were

determined to see that their failure was not replicated by their children. Even after

countless failed initiatives in the district, they expressed optimism and appreciation for

the opportunity to participate in the process, hence they willingly completed the surveys.

Olsen and Fuller (2003) agreed,

> In establishing a working partnership with low-income parents, you must
> remember that a lack or resources doesn't indicate a lack of love for their
> children. Furthermore, although they may not be pedagogical experts, they are
> experts as far as their children are concerned and we need that expertise. (p. 282)

A total of 14 middle school homeroom and activity teachers responded to the

teacher survey as well as the Employee Satisfaction Survey in Appendix G. While they

were enthusiastic about the prospect of experimental single-gender classes, they also, were cognizant of countless failed initiatives. Previously, directives and information trickled from the top down and no one solicited their input or opinion. The new transformational leader at the site was a visionary who had successfully empowered and rejuvenated the staff to create a shared vision and see themselves as essential entities in the transformation of the school. Evans (1996) discussed the importance of promoting continuous dialogue with the staff about professional values and how to translate these into practice. "The leader works with the staff to make explicit the school's defining values and beliefs and to translate them into informal norms for performance and behavior, and he then relies on these norms to ensure fulfillment" (p. 173).

Conceptual Framework for Change

Knowledge, expertise, and valuable insight in school reform, organizational change, and leadership was gained by studying the works of Fullan (2001), Evans (1996), Senge (2006), Kotter (1996), Collins (2001), and others. It is imperative that researchers and leaders are cognizant of their roles as agents of change. Fullan (2001) compared change to a double-edge sword: it can bring about improvement, but at a pace that is difficult to keep up with. When things are unsettled we can discover ways to move ahead and create breakthroughs.

An environmental scan, interviews, and the compilation of data painted an accurate picture regarding the severity of the challenges and issues at the site. Student surveys conducted by the School Leadership Committee (SLC) indicated a lack of enthusiasm for learning as students transitioned from elementary to the middle school grades. According to the school's monthly discipline atom there was also a considerable

increase in violent incidents at the school. Consultants and representatives from the State

Department of Education conducted a comprehensive assessment of the site and

consequently recommended the implementation of best educational practices, strategies,

and programs which would serve to empower the students, improve self-efficacy, and

positively influence their performance on district and state assessments. Marzano,

Waters, and McNulty (2005) made the following statement. "Identifying the right work to

undertake in a school is to design a site-specific intervention to create or identify an

intervention that address the specific needs of the school" (p. 81).

Rather than focus on first order change, Evans (1996) suggested that leaders

concentrate on second order change, which is systematic in nature and focuses on

modifying the manner in which organizations are put together, hence altering

assumptions, goals, roles, and norms. With the level of accountability as it pertains to

student performance on standardized assessments, many educators are faced with the

problem of student behavior and academic disengagement particularly as they enter the

middle school grades. Studies support the belief that when both male and female students

enter the middle level grades, their enthusiasm for learning decreases and there is a

considerable increase in behavioral and discipline issues. Dweck (2008) stated,

> The transition to junior high is a time of great challenge for many students. The
> work gets much harder, the grading policies toughen up, the teaching becomes
> less personalized. And all this happens while students are coping with their new
> adolescent bodies and roles. (p. 57)

In an attempt to initiate and anchor effective plans of action, the decision was

made to incorporate Kotter's (1996) Eight Stage Process of creating major change. The

staff at the site where the research was conducted consisted of a group of individuals who

had been through a series of fruitless and unsuccessful change efforts, therefore they were

extremely suspicious of any type of motives for transformation. Because of the chaotic

situation, many expressed a lack of faith and confidence in any change initiative. Evans

(1996) postulated,

> Traditional organizational change often fails because its designers,
> overemphasizing rationality, underestimate the opposition reform generates and
> the power of staff members to resist. They frequently fail to build a base of
> suppport for their innovations and staff are often unwilling or unable to fullfill the
> new roles created for them. (p. 16)

The first of Kotter's steps calls for the establishment of a sense of urgency.

Kotter (1996) agreed that establishing a sense of urgency is crucial to gaining cooperation

from stakeholders. Without a sense of urgency it was almost impossible to create a cadre

with enough credibility to facilitate the effort or convince essential individuals to

embrace the change vision. Kotter also discussed the fact that in organizations such as

Hopeville Community School that are complacency filled, change initiatives are usually

dead on arrival.

In order to set the stage to commence conducting the study, it was imperative that

a sense of urgency was established by focusing on relevant data that indicated the

severity of the crisis. Rigorous efforts were made to solicit the assistance of key players

and informal leaders within the organization who assisted in creating the conditions

necessary to support a healthy transformation. Reeves (2006) discussed the importance of

soliciting the assistance and talents of capable individuals: "Rather than develop what

they lack, great leaders will magnify their own strengths and simultaneously create teams

that do not mimic the leader but provide different and equally important strengths for the

organization" (p. 23).

65

Because major change is often difficult to accomplish, no one individual can work in isolation to create and communicate the vision. In the second step, Kotter (1996) revealed the following as the four key characteristics that are essential to effective coalitions. The first is positive power which calls for enough key players on board. The second characteristic is expertise which deals with points of view and well informed individuals who are capable of making intelligent decisions. The third focuses on the credibility and reputation of individuals so that they can be taken seriously by all other stakeholders. These are individuals who conducted themselves with uncompromising honesty and integrity. In other words, they lead by example. The fourth characteristic stipulated the leadership of the coalition. It consists of a group of individuals who are capable of effectively driving the change process. As I chose individuals for the coalition who were responsible for the implementation of experimental single-gender classes I incorporated precautions in order to refrain from choosing anyone who might sabotage efforts. Kotter cautioned,

> Two types of individuals should be avoided at all costs when putting together a guiding coalition. The first have egos that fill up a room, leaving no space for anybody else. The second are what I call snakes, people who create enough mistrust to kill teamwork. (p. 58)

In their discussion regarding the importance of teamwork, Stowell and Mead (2007) provided the following advise: "Teamwork doesn't just happen by chance. Bringing a group of people together to accomplish a task does not guarantee a Mona Lisa-like outcome everytime. The construction of a meaningful team requires commitment, resolve, courage, and discipline" (p. 2). The team consisted of five middle school teachers, the guidance counselor, two parent representatives, two middle school students, a representative from central office, the vice principal at the site and myself who

was also the gatekeeper of the organization. During the month of April 2009, the first of several brainstorming sessions on the implementation of single-gender classes occurred.

Despite some initial elements of groupthink and minor disagreements, the team worked cohesively. In this group of talented individuals there was great strength, capacity, purpose, and knowledge. The pride along with the vested interest in the organization were motivational sources for the group. The decision to effectively establish experimental single-gender classes for the middle school students so that the research could be conducted was a unanimous one. Stowell and Mead (2007) postulated "Consensus takes time, patience, and a unique skill set in order to be accomplished" (p. 18).

A vision can be defined as a statement about what the organization wants to become and the strategies involved in the transformation. It should resonate with all stakeholders of the organization and help them feel proud, excited, motivated, and part of something much bigger than themselves. A vision should broaden the organization's capabilities and create a profile and direction to the future of the organization. Kotter (1996) utilized step three to discuss the importance of developing a vision to help guide the change effort and to implement strategies for achieving the vision and all intended outcomes. The vision at Hopeville was to provide middle school students with effective and meaningful experiences and ultimately enhance their academic performance on district and standardized assessments.

Kotter's fourth step implies that effective information transferred always relies on repetition and reiteration. Since one of the most effective ways to communicate the vision was through action, it was imperative that the entire coalition led by example. If the

group was seen acting out the vision then there would be no question about credibility, hence stakeholders were more susceptible to embrace the initiative. Members of the coalition became the cheerleaders for implementation of single-gender classes. It became the focal point of their conversations and it was obvious that communicating the vision served to motivate people to take action as they enlisted in focused strategies that were critical in the implementation of single-gender classes. The goal of the coalition was not simply to get stakeholders to agree with the vision, but also to take responsibility for translating it into reality.

Step five of Kotter's model discussed the ability to empower broad based action. An essential component of the plan involved extinguishing obstacles, encouraging risk taking, and changing systems that undermine the initiative to implement single-gender classes. Environmental change demands organizational reform, therefore all stakeholders were attuned with the vision and all systems were aligned to the intended outcome. Provisions were included so that the staff received professional development to assist them in adapting the new behaviors, skills, and attitudes needed in order for the transformation to be successful. Reeves (2006) suggested, "professional development must be based on research-based strategies" (p. 79).

During grade level articulation meetings stakeholders received appropriate training and professional development regarding the implementation of the experimental single-gender education classes. Teachers also engaged in self-reflection activities in order to identify practices and actions that may have affected student academic performance or attitude. They completed surveys on their attitude toward middle-school students and discussed their personal perceptions regarding the advantages and

disadvantages of single-gender classes. Additionally, plans were made for the school communiity to receive data on the viability of the study. Visits were also made to a nearby school where single-gender education classes had been successfully implemented for several years.

The goal setting component of this study was guided by the foundations component, which informed weekly discussions with the group of homeroom teachers who were primarily responsible for educating the middle school students. During bi-weekly meetings, topics such as students'self-efficacy, behavior, academic engagement and performance, and relationships with peers and teachers were investigated.

As stipulated in step six of Kotter's process, the team was also cognizant of the significance of celebrating short-term wins. Kotter explained that they provide evidence that the sacrifices made were well worth the effort. Efforts to acknowledge agents were discussed and any progress made was an excellent tool to build morale and motivate stakeholders. As the paradigm shift began and students demonstrated increased levels of responsibility for their actions and behavior they, along with their teachers, were acknowledged during the morning announcements over the intercom. At the end of the school year they were rewarded with several class trips to the Baseball Hall of Fame, Harlem, New York City, and several other educational sites. Most importantly, cynics and resisters began to receive the justification and proof needed to come on board.

Step seven of Kotter's change process reiterated the importance of consolidating improvements and to produce more change within the organization as they pertain to the study of experimental single-gender classes. This step was appropriately and systematically followed by the final step eight, which addressed the ability to anchor new

approaches in the culture of the school. More projects will be launched as the program is monitored and evaluated. Subsequently, if the data provide information regarding the viability and advantages of single-gender classes, the initiative can be deeply grounded, and stakeholders will see the importance of staying the course and embracing the implementation of best practices, which will ultimately be embedded into the culture of the school.

Schein (2004) discussed step eight of Kotter's Eight Stage Process. He also believed that change was inevitable and could eventually become entrenched in the espoused beliefs and attitudes of the organization. Regardless of the immediate crisis at hand, culture cannot be easily manipulated and it changes only after the actions, beliefs, and attitudes of stakeholders have been altered. With dedication, sensitivity, strong communication skills, patience, and effective use of data, experimental single-gender classes were implemented at Hopeville. Hence the stage was set to conduct a valid, thorough, research study on the impact of single-gender classes on middle-school students in an urban setting. It was imperative that the correlation between new behaviors and the success of the organization was understood by all stakeholders.

Overview of Action Research Project

Cycle I.

The beginning: Planning and goal setting. The main purpose of the first cycle of the action research project was to form a coalition to discuss ideas and strategies regarding the implementation of experimental single-gender classes for middle school students in grades 6, 7, and 8. Pertinent information was gathered to gain an insight into stakeholders' perceptions and feelings toward the initiative. It is common knowledge that

schools cannot function without the cooperation of teachers and other stakeholders. However no group of individuals was mechanically entitled to teamwork simply because they bring their individual talents and exertions to the table. Stowell and Mead (2007) mentioned, "Yet many people talk about teamwork as if it is a no brainer, mistakenly believing that just because a group of smart people gets together, a high-performing team is automatically created" (p. 8).

One of the distinguishing characteristics of leadership is the ability to form teams within the organization and encourage their viability by providing the necessary support and resources. When principals and other leaders empower their staffs through providing leadership opportunities and decision-making authority, everyone benefits. Initially, there was some resistance due to the fact that they had been inundated with many failed initiatives in the past and were simply resistant. With my adaptation of the traits of the transformational, servant, resonant, and instructional leadership styles, I was willing to address individual resistance and reverse their fear and anxiety by gaining trust and instilling faith based on my honesty, openess, and integrity. Evans (1996) concurred, "Unfreezing is a matter of lessening one kind of anxiety, the fear of trying, but first of mobilizing another kind of anxiety, the fear of not trying" (p. 56).

The coalition consisted of five middle school teachers, the vice principal at the site, the guidance counselor, two parent representatives, two middle school students, a representative from central office, and the researcher. In an attempt to attain "buy in" and eliminate bias, it was important to choose a representative from each group of stakeholders. Being competent and talented was also the price of entry on the coalition. Stowell and Mead (2007) agreed, "The construction of a meaningful team requires

71

commitment, resolve, courage, and discipline. Teams are like a splendid building that has been designed and constructed to stand the test of time" (p. 2).

Consultants like CAPA and Cambridge Review classified Hopeville as a chronically failing school in dire need of improvement. They reiterated the need for the implementation of best practices and the importance of building capacity throughout the organization. Downey (2003) agreed, "Everyone understands the need for staff development if you are going to get higher student achievement. We will do this only through the development of staff capacity" (p. 188). The consultants reiterated the importance of aligning all phases of the curriculum and instruction with district and standardized assessments and of using data to make informed decisions.

Creswell (2007) explained the importance of field-testing and added that it is utilized to ascertain the content validity of instruments and to improve questions and formats that may be used in the research. This was necessary to set the stage for a comprehensive investigation to be conducted on the attitudes, behavior, self-efficacy, and the academic engagement and performance of middle school students.

Valuable data regarding student performance on the New Jersey Assessment of Skills and Knowledge (NJASK) was obtained from reviewing the visual representation in Appendix I. The NJASK is a standardized test given to all New Jersey public-schooled students in grades 3-8 during the months of April or May, and is monitored by the New Jersey Department of Education. The purpose of New Jersey's statewide assessments is to measure what students at specific grade levels know and are able to do. The assessments are not designed to be diagnostic, nor do students' scores on these assessments equate with classroom grades. Instead, the assessments determine whether

students are achieving the knowledge and skills described in New Jersey's Core Curriculum Content Standards (NJ CCCS).

All schools are expected to obtain Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP). AYP is the key measure in determining whether a public school or school district is making "annual progress" towards the academic goals established by each state. Each state is responsible for setting goals that call for continuous and substantial improvement of each public school district and public school, with the ultimate outcome that all students must meet the state's standards for proficiency in language arts and math by the year 2014.

To obtain a level of proficient as required by the State Department of Education, students must obtain a score of 200 points. A score of 300 is considered a perfect score. To obtain a level of advanced proficient requires a score of 250-300. Any score below 200 is considered partially proficient or failure. Appendix I reveals the results of the NJASK that were obtained during the month of July, prior to the implementation of single-gender classes at the site.

The findings of the study can be instrumental in the configuration of middle schools as well as the design of coherent instruction and the manner in which it can captivate the attention and focus of middle school students. This information was beneficial as school and district leaders made informed, data driven decisions, which addressed the academic disengagement experienced by most middle school students in urban settings. Gall et al. (2005) discussed the importance of conducting meaningful research. "Educators need a large amount of knowledge in order to carry out their work effectively. For example, they need knowledge about the learning process, knowledge about student characteristics, and knowledge about school management" (p. 8). The

organization that gathers and disaggregates data can analyze them in order to find

historical patterns or connections that allow them to make important decisions and to

develop a vision for the organization.

Parents of middle school students received ongoing correspondence stipulating

the goals of experimental single-gender classes. Letters were also sent requesting

permission for their middle school students to participate in the initiative. The response

was overwhelmingly supportive. Parents, guardians, and the community at large

welcomed the proposal and expressed confidence that the project would indeed address

the needs of their middle school students. The goal was to establish transparency and

keep Hopeville stakeholders abreast of programs and initiatives. Price (2002) affirmed,

"The active involvement of parents is the first step in creating a level educational playing

field. Parental involvement in a school can help turn it from a failure to a center of

excellence" (p. 19).

In order to organize activities and actions, a traditional Strategic Planning Model

was followed (Figure 1). The model proceeded from the vision, mission, and values of

the organization to an analysis of needs, to developing strategies to address those needs,

and then finally to create plans of action. Another purpose of the model was to yield

equally widespread support for the action plan, understand the challenges of the

organization, and establish a sense of urgency. Observations and interviews with people

involved in the strategic planning phase revealed potential for clarity and a unified effort

as well as the possibility of chaos and exhaustion (Reeves, 2006).

Figure 1. Strategic Planning Model.

Implementation. Since all middle school students qualified to participate in the study, a simple random sampling was chosen. The names of all the female middle school students were placed in a jar and names were randomly selected. The same process was completed to obtain the names of the male participants. Students were then informed that they were chosen to participate in the study and because they were minors, written permission was obtained from their parents and guardians permitting them to take part in the study. Students whose parents did not provide written approval were not included in the study.

Data collection consisted of surveys, interview questionnaires, data regarding student performance on state assessments, and discipline atoms. During observations, data were recorded in the form of handwritten field notes as well as the utilizing of

technological devices. The use of different forms of qualitative data provided credibility for the study. The triangulation of the data also facilitated reliability of the study of single-gender classes for middle school students in an urban setting.

The student presurvey consisted of approximately 24 Likert-type questions to which students responded via written communication. The survey instrument served to answer questions regarding students' self-efficacy, level of comfort in school, relationship with teachers, relationship with classmates, behavior, level of engagement, and academic achievement. I needed to gain insight on the direction the study would take based on the perceptions of the students. This helped to develop sections of data that when disaggregated would serve to make comparisons regarding students' perception of single–gender classes. Hence, they ultimately determined the feasibility of experimental single-gender classes at this particular setting.

Student presurvey. A total of 21male and 21 female middle school students participated in the study and completed surveys (Appendix D) during their first day in single-gender classes. Surveys were administered by the guidance counselor who distributed them during students'weekly social studies and civic education periods. The most represented grade in the number of participants were from the eighth grade. All students responded to questions regarding their level of comfort, relationships with peers, relationship with teachers, academic engagement and performance, self-efficacy, and behavior. Surveys were gathered and secured. Glesne (2006) explained the importance of confidentiality and securing information received from participants. "Consequently researchers must consciously consider and protect the rights of participants to privacy"

(p. 138). Participants were cognizant of the implementation of confidentiality and anonymity in the research study.

Marzano, et al. (2005) observed, "Deep change alters the system in fundamental ways, offering a dramatic shift in direction and requiring new ways of thinking and acting" (p. 66). While the initiative was positively received by the majority of the staff, it was imperative that all phases of the implementation process were systematic and well organized. It was crucial that all stakeholders worked cohesively to make the transition a successful one. Medin and Medin (2005) discussed the reason for the successful implementation of single-gender classes at Thurgood Marshall School. "According to Principal Benjamin Wright, one key to this success story was careful preparation and professional development prior to the conversion to a single-sex institution" (p. 17).

As decided during planning and goal setting meetings, all classes in the middle school cohort were organized in single-gender grouping. The suggestion was made by a student representative to name each classroom after Historic Black Colleges and Universities (HBCU). These included Spelman, Morehouse, North Carolina Agricultural & Technical, Clark Atlanta, Morris Brown, North Carolina Central, Johnson, C. Smith, and Bethune Cookman. The intended outcome of this strategy was to inspire students as they became familiar with the history, mission, and vision of these organizations. Another approach was to continuously emphasize the countless obstacles and opposition faced by their ancestors and other African Americans and the path they paved to ensure that current middle school students and others receive opportunities to pursue their goals and life aspirations. Consequently they may be motivated to obtain a college education and possibly attend one of the colleges which the single-gender classes were named after.

Price (2002) postulated,

> College is another place to look for helpful lessons about how to improve the achievement levels of youngsters in elementaty and secondary school. There are programs in higher education I've heard about that do a terrific job of boosting the scholastic performance of minority students. (p. 26)

Cycle II. The main purpose of the second cycle of the action research project was to gather relevant data and infuse triangulation. In general it is best if action researchers do not rely on only one single source of data or on any one type of data collection tool. Research is stronger if the information is collected in a variety of ways. During this cycle participants were interviewed and observations were conducted. Interviews are ways for participants to get involved and talk about their views. In addition, the interviewees are able to discuss their perception and interpretation in regard to a given situation. It is their expression from their point of view. A key advantage of observation research is it provides opportunities for the researcher to observe respondents in their natural setting.

Student interviews. During the course of the study, students were interviewed on a one-on-one basis. Doing a one-on-one interview with a potential candidate has many advantages. Firstly, the candidate or interviewee might feel comfortable in a one-on-one interview and speak more openly and give more information in terms of open-ended questions. One-on-one interviews provided a relaxing, less formal environment for respondents. Subsequently they felt less self-conscious. I had the opportunity to obtain detailed information about the participants' feelings, perceptions, and opinions along with asking more detailed questions and clarifying ambiguities and pressing on for full answers or following up on incomplete answers. Clarity was provided on questions as requested by each interviewee. Additionally, questions were delved into deeper so that I obtained a full sense of the perception of each interviewee (Wiersma & Jurs, 2005).

During the entire month of November, the 42 respondents were interviewed. The interview protocol (Appendix H) was very detailed and each interview was approximately 45 minutes long. Interviews were conducted in the confines of a quiet conference room at the site. With gentle probing, students spoke truthfully about their daily experiences, hobbies, grades, aspirations, relationships with classmates and teachers, and their overall level of comfort in the single-gender education classes. Audio recordings of interviews were employed and later transcribed. Bogdan and Biklen (2007) reiterated the purpose of interviews. "Good interviews are those in which the subjects are at ease and talk freely about their points of view" (p. 104).

The interviews can be summarized as interpersonal encounters with each participant. Trust and rapport had already been established and respondents were aware of the fact that anonymity and confidentiality were essential factors throughout the process. The standardized open-ended interview protocol was utilized whereby the exact wording and sequence of questions were determined in advance. All interviewees were asked the same basic questions in the same order and they were worded in an open-ended format. Johnson and Christensen (2004) agreed that this style of interviewing reduces interviewer effects and bias. Additionally, since participants responded to the same questions, it increased the comparability of responses and data were compiled for each respondent on the topics addressed during the interview.

Observations. Observational techniques are methods by which a researcher gathers firsthand data on programs, processes, or behaviors being studied. During this study, they provided me with an opportunity to collect data on a wide range of behaviors, to capture a great variety of interactions, and to openly explore the topic that was being

studied. By directly observing operations, participants, and activities, I developed a holistic perspective, that is, an understanding of the perspective within which the project operated. Observational approaches also allowed me to learn about things the participants or staff may be unaware of or that they were unwilling or unable to discuss during interview. The purpose of conducting observations was to implement triangulation and to observe actions, attitudes, and behavior of participants. Johnson and Christensen (2004) defined observation as "the unobtrusive watching of behavioral patterns of people in certain situations to obtain information about the phenomenon of interest" (p. 147).

Continuous observations allowed me to collect important data regarding the interactions between students and their peers as well as the communication and exchanges between students and teachers in the school. Observations began during the 3rd week of September, 2009; 2 weeks following the implementation of single-gender classes, and continued throughout the school year until the 2nd week of June, 2010. Approximately 40 hours of observations were conducted. As observations were conducted, special attention was given to students' relationships and interactions with each other and with teachers, student behavior, self-efficacy, student academic engagement and performance, and their level of comfort in single-gender classes.

Cycle III. Cycle III involved the collection of significant data regarding the students' prospective on single-gender education. The active and authentic involvement of students has been identified as a key factor in empowering students to influence learning and reform policies, programs, contexts, and principles. Personalized experiences concerning their participating in single-gender classes can be instrumental in communicating ideas and influencing change.

Student postsurvey. During the final week of school, following a complete year of experience in single-gender classes, students completed a post survey (Appendix D) that was identical to the one completed during the 1st week of participating in single-gender classes. It was necessary to gather information in order to analyze data and conduct crosstabulations to record any changes that students might have experienced. The triangulation of the data also facilitated reliability. This information can be very instrumental in determining the viability of single-gender classes and may be used as a basis to encourage further exploration, and possible expansion of the initiative.

Cycle IV. The purpose of this cycle was to collect important data on the perspective of teachers and parents regarding student participation in single-gender classes. The goal was to get teachers and parents to express their genuine feelings without hesitation. Teachers valued opportunities to talk and voice their opinions. They appreciated any opportunity to make their vocation more significant, and to transform the teaching/learning process in a manner that keeps it meaningful, engaging, and effective. The contribution from parents who participated acknowledged the importance of the role they played in their child's education and an overview of their experiences at Hopeville. Their input was necessary because both groups shared a vested interest in the students at Hopeville.

Teacher survey. During the month of June, middle school teachers completed a survey in Appendix E that contained Likert-type questions regarding student performance following a year of experience in single-gender classes. A random sampling technique was used in order to gain pertinent data from a good representation of middle schoool teachers. A total of 15 surveys were distributed and 14 were returned. The main purpose

of the survey was to determine to what degree single-gender classes positively impacted the progress of students in the areas of student academic engagement, behavior, self-efficacy, level of comfort, relationship with peers, relationship with teachers, and academic achievement. Shortly thereafter, teachers also completed an Employee Satisfaction Survey (Appendix G), in order to assess their perception of the leadership of the organization.

Parent survey. The Parent Survey in Appendix F was completed during the second week of June, following a year of student participation in single-gender classes. In order to implement triangulation, a survey containing similar items to those found in the Teacher Survey in Appendix E, was completed by parents. A total of 80 surveys were randomly distributed to parents of middle school students. A total of 24 responded and important data were gathered regarding parents' synopsis of their child's performance in single-gender classes. Like the teacher survey, parents responded to questions regarding their child's relationship with peers and teachers, and their academic engagement and achievement.

Parent interviews. It was extremely important to create and maintain meaningful working relationships between parents and the school. Parents are their child's first teacher and critical to student success is their involvement. It is essential that both parent and the school work cohesively to create and facilitate the vision of the school. Parents of struggling students are already overwhelmed and often have unpleasant experiences with the school, therefore, it is extremely important to keep the doors open and welcome parents to share in the educational goals of the school.

During the month of August, 2010, parents of middle school students at Hopeville were randomly selected and asked to participate in an interview process. Out of the 60, a total of 12 agreed to be interviewed and subsequently discussed their opinions and observations following a year of their student's participation in single-gender classes at Hopeville Community School. Parents were interviewed individually and no specific interview protocol was followed. The topic of interest was introduced and each interviewee engaged in informal conversations regarding the behavior, academic engagement and performance, self-efficacy, and relationships with peers and teachers, and level of comfort, of their middle school students. Johnson and Christensen (2004) added, "The informal conversational interview is the most spontaneous and loosely structured of the three types of qualitative interviews. The interviewer discusses the topics of interest and follows all leads that emerge during the discussion" (p. 144).

Data Analysis

The qualitative and quantative data collected during the action research on single-gender education at Hopeville Community School were analyzed using the software of Statistical Package for Social Services (SPSS). All gathered data were secured and I was the only one with access. They were transcribed using my notes as well as the tape recordings of the interviews and discussion. The data were then placed in categories and coded by computing the responses on the surveys, interviews, and questionnaires. Frequency tables were created and percentages tabulated. Cross tabulations of the coded, categorized data were also completed. The final step of the process facilitated a review of the data analysis to check for reliability, triangulation, and validity.

Frequency or statistical tables revealed how the 21 male and the 21 female students responded to each of the choices. The responses from parents and teachers were also analyzed. Nominal variables were used to label the categories and count the frequencies of occurrence. In other words, a comparison was made regarding the frequency of the responses to learn how they were distributed. Because the research topic involved the gathering of information as it pertained to the gender gap, frequency tables were also utilized to formulate cross-tabulations which allowed comparisons to be made between the responses of pre and postsurveys.

According to Glesne (2006), coding is a progressive process of sorting and defining scraps of collected data by putting together like-minded pieces of data in clumps and creating an organizational framework. Many of the survey questions were designed to generate information for certain coding categories. Upon completion of the gathering of data, responses as well as written observations were analyzed in order to identify trends, patterns, regularities, words, and phrases. In order to make sense of the applicable information that was observed and collected, a code book was created. These commonalities then became coding categories which were a means of sorting and organizing data.

Data were sorted into several categories. Student Comfort Level (SCL), Student Academic Achievement (SAA), Student Behavior (SB), Student Academinc Performance (SAP), Student Academic Engagement (SAE), Self-Efficacy (SE), Student Relationships With Teachers (SRWT), and Student Relationships With Peers (SRWP). Equal interval data determined the degree to which each respondent had a positive or negative response toward single-gender education. An attitude scale provided a total

score for each of the items in order to gather pertinent data regarding the academic engagement, relationship with peers and teachers, self-efficacy, level of comfort, academic achievement, and behavior of urban middle school students in single-gender classes.

Ethics and Confidentiality

 To protect the confidentiality of the participants, no names were used in the research; instead two letters were randomly selected from the alphabet and assigned to each participant. A series of numbers were used to identify and classify each type of data gathered throughout the study. Glesne (2006) cautioned, "In discussions of the rights of research participants, privacy is generally the foremost concern. Participants have a right to expect that when they give you permission to observe and interview, you will protect their confidences and preserve their anonymity" (p. 38). All behavior and actions throughout the duration of the study were in compliance with those specified in the IRB. Confidentiality and anonymity were crucial to avoid connecting the participant with any information that might be embarrassing or harmful.

The protection of the rights and privacy of human subjects who participate in research activities is mandated by federal law. The National Research Act Public Law 99-158, The Health Research Extension Act of 1985, and the National Commission for the Protection of Human Subjects of Biomedical and Behavioral Research provide stringent guidelines to ensure their protection and ethical treatment.

Bogdan and Bilken (2007) advised, "While people make up guidelines for ethical decision making the tough ethical decisions ultimately reside with you, your values, and your judgments of right or wrong" (p. 52). In addition to the specifications of the IRB

process, all requests were submitted in a timely manner and all required protocols

regarding the soliciting of parental consent to allow their minors to participate in the

research study were completed. Clandinin and Connelly (2000) made the following

statement: "Understanding ethical approaches for informed consent from a relational

point of view gives us another way of thinking about our questions" (p. 171).

The guidance counselor of the site was responsible for introducing the study

and corresponding with parents and guardians of the participants. Participation in the

study was strictly voluntary and no incentives or rewards were offered, guaranteed,

or promised. Additionally, all participants were astutely aware of their option to

discontinue the study if they chose to do so. All data were secured and I was the only one

with access.

Validity and Reliability

In order to produce a valid and reliable research study, the utilization of

triangulation was instituted throughout the data collection. Triangulation calls for the

verification of facts and for researchers to be cognizant of the fact that more sources of

data are better and more reliable than one single source. It also alludes to the fact that

multiple sources lead to a better understanding of what is being studied. Additionally,

triangulation is related to internal validity, which is necessary as the investigation is

conducted. Glesne (2006) discussed the fact that the use of various methods of data

collection enhances the trustworthiness and reliability of the data.

It is imperative that researchers establish validity in the research. Creswell (2009)

advised, "Tringulate different data sources of information by examining evidence from

the source and using it to build a coherent justification for themes" (p. 191). It was crucial

that the data collection strategies and the methodologies executed were precise, efficient, and accurate. In order to augment the validity of the study, member checking was one of the main strategies integrated in all aspects of the research. The guidance counselor and two middle school teachers assisted in the reviewing of the student survey and questionaire to ensure that there were was no ambiguity. Additionally, survey questions, interviews, observations, and other data collection strategies were multiple sources utilized to support each premis.

Because qualitative research calls for the researcher to be an essential part of the research, it was imperative that trust was established. This was obtained by building relationships with all parties involved via informal conversations as rapport was developed. My ability to demonstrate flexibility, respect, and consideration was also critical in order to fit in with local behavioral norms. The trust that was establish and the comfort level of the respondents made the efforts to institute validity and reliability less challenging. In the following statement, Johnson and Christensen (2004) reiterated the importance of the respectful and ethical treatment of respondents: "Treatment of research participants is the most important and fundamental issue that researchers must confront" (p. 66).

Chapter 4: Research Findings

Introduction

The main purpose of this action research project was to implement experimental single-gender classes at Hopeville Community School and also to deduce the perceptions of teachers, students, and parents at the site. Critics and supporters of single-gender classes agree that there is no conclusive research to support single-gender classes and that additional exploration is required to determine the overall effectiveness of single-gender classes (Salomone, 2006). The study was also essential since, in order to to positively influence student self-efficacy, behavior, academic engagement and performance, level of comfort, and relationships with peers and teachers, there is an urgent need to construct an educational environment that addressed the social and intellectual needs of both genders. Stanworth (1983) stated,

> Our schools welcome children impartially, that without regard for ascribed characteristics, social class for example, or race or sex, schools stimulate individual talents to the full and reshuffle children according to ability is one of the most cherished myths of our time-the myth of meritocracy. (p. 9)

Cycle I Findings

The main objective of Cycle I was to determine the perceptions of essential stakeholders regarding the implementation of single-gender education at Hopeville Community School. The formation of the coalition revealed that members had insights, expertise, and experience that promoted buy in and collaboration. Members included the vice principal at the site, a representative from central office, the guidance counselor, parents, students, and teachers.The synergy of the coalition encouraged reticent

individuals to share their ideas and opinions and engendered a sense of faith and commitment in anticipation of the intended outcome.

The implementation of the initiative was guided by the Strategic Planning Model (Figure 1). The first step of the plan stipulated the multiple action plans and tasks for each strategy. Multiple strategies were adopted to implement the mission. They were based on the values and goals of the organization. During this cycle, students also completed a presingle-gender survey (Appendix D). This helped me to understand the complex issues regarding student experiences in school. Immediately following the collection, data was entered into the Statistical Program for Social Science (SPSS) software program. This allowed me to accurately analyze the responses from students. The presurvey suggested that students at Hopeville were quite unhappy with their middle school experiences. The findings from Cycle I led to the development of Cycle II. Students' perception of single-gender education was evaluated through student pre and postsurveys, interviews, observations, and the collection of fieldnotes.

Planning and goal setting. Kotter (1996) stated, "Vision plays a key role in producing useful change by helping to direct, align, and inspire actions on the part of large numbers of people" (p. 7). One of the major goals of the coalition was the communication of the vision to the general body of stakeholders at Hopeville. Clear, memorable, and consistent communication from members of the coalition was necessary to share information regarding the experimental middle school single-gender classes. Meaningful conversations and discussions were also welcomed as essential methods of providing lucidity and helping people to answer questions that occured to them in this transformation effort. Wheatley (1999) agreed, "Another organization was able to change

its approach to information by changing its metaphors. Instead of the limiting thought that "information is power, they began to think of information as nourishment" (p. 101).

The first of 5 weekly meetings took place on Wednesday April 8th, 2009. It was held following student dismissal and lasted for approximately 2 hours. During this meeting the coalition reviewed data regarding the dismal performance of middle school students at Hopeville and agreed that there was indeed a sense of urgency. The second team meeting occurred on April 29, 2009, and lasted for 1 hour. The coalition resumed the discussion and held steadfastly to the assurance that single-gender education was the most feasible and practical option to address the academic and social emotional needs of middle school students at Hopeville. The third meeting occurred on Friday, May 15, 2009 and lasted for 2 hours. During this team meeting, the coalition charted the effective implementation of the program. During the final meetings which were held on Wednesday June 4th and Wednesday June 17, 2009, explicit data gathered identified major themes surfaced during planning and goal setting meetings. Themes included Teams Working Cohesively (TW), Concern for Academic Achievement (CFAA), Student Behavior (SB), Coalition Expectations (CE), and the overall need for the teachers of middle school students to align their attitudes and actions with the vision of the school (TA). Since members of the coalition were astutely aware of the dismal academic performance of the middle school students, coupled with a major increase in discipline issues, there was minimal difficulty convincing them of the importance of the implementation of experimental single-gender classes.

Teamwork. Paramount was the team's ability to work cohesively in order to accomplish the goals of the organization. One of the key advantages of teamwork is a

better end result. Effective teams are more responsive to the changing needs of the organization and further informed about research based practices and strategies necessary to make informed decisions. Stowell and Mead (2007) added, "Finally, teams have to navigate through the important tasks required to achieve success: defining the task, developing effective processes and tools, and then executing successfully" (p. 18).

The beliefs, discernment, and confidence of the coalition at Hopeville were essential during the educational inquiry into the impact of single-gender classes. They required clear conceptualizations, careful examination of key assumptions, consistent understanding and adherence to precise meanings as well as appropriate assessment and investigation of specific belief constructs. Judging from the dialogue during meetings with the coalition, the teachers were obviously embarrassed by the dismal performance and the behavior of the middle school students and vowed to make a genuine effort to align their actions with the vision of the school.

Academic achievement. As shown in Appendix I, in 2009, prior to their participation in single-gender classes, only 12% of the participants were able to obtain a level of proficiency on the Math portion of the NJASK. As required by the State Department of Education, a score of 200 points on any portion of the NJASK indicates that students have obtained a level of proficiency. In the area of Language Arts Literacy 26% of the participants were proficient. Data from these findings (Appendix I) also supported responses from teachers, parents, and consultants regarding the sense of urgency, which was needed to address the deficiencies in student academic achievement. There was a strong sense of concern and anguish regarding students' inability to do well on standardized assessments.

An eighth grade teacher commented:

> It is so embarrassing that our school continuously fails to acquire safe harbor; forget about adequate yearly progress. We are not making the grade. I don't know how much longer I can tolerate this disappointment.

A veteran seventh grade teacher stated:

> I simply cannot tolerate another year of failure. If only I can see a glimmer of hope it would inspire me to keep trying.

The vice principal explained:

> It is so humiliating to attend the monthly meetings with the superintendent. The condition of Hopeville and the dismal scores are usually the topic of discussion. It is simply disgraceful.

The teachers empathized with their students based on their needs and observable patterns of behavior that required remediation or intervention. They also mentioned that it was not their intention to preclude any student from succeeding and achieving the intended outcome of the lesson. Despite their level of empathy, the overall consensus was that while they worked tirelessly to provide students with effective and meaningful learning experiences, the brunt of the culpability fell on the shoulders of their students, many of whom made the choice to be disengaged and disconnected from the learning process.

Student behavior. Information was also collected regarding student behavior. Table 11 in Appendix J provides data from the Discipline Atom that was prepared by administrators at Hopeville. This document, which contained the name and grade level of each student, a brief description of each infraction, and the consequence, was submitted to the office of the district superintendent on a monthly basis. The district had a strict policy of documenting infractions and acts of violence committed by students. The preparation of the discipline atom was also a result of findings of the nation's Education

Reform Subcommittee that held a hearing and came to the conclusion that many districts were seriously underreporting the number of violent acts in schools, which may result in many schools being classified as unsafe and dangerous. As a result of the hearing, the Department of Education changed the guidelines for the unsafe school choice component of NCLB. Instead of the previous criteria of 3 years and a concentration on incidents that only involved gun violence as part of the definition, schools are now required to submit reports annually. It was also amended to include all acts of violence (Daniels & Snell, 2009).

Appendix J contains the list of infractions committed by 22 middle school students who received in school and out of school suspensions. The Discipline Atom was prepared by Hopeville administrators for the month of June, 2009, prior to the implementation of single-gender classes. Infractions included defacing school property, cutting classes, stealing, bullying, and the blatant use of profanity. The data clearly revealed that during a period of 1 month, 11.22% of middle school students at Hopeville received at least one out of school or in school suspension. It also substantiated information gathered at the site that revealed the need for programs, strategies, and interventions to address the pressing issue of student inappropriate behavior. Despite the fact that the findings were no surprise to the members of the coalition, they verbally expressed their disgust for the continuous inappropriate behavior of students at the site. An activity teacher remarked:

> The data does not lie! There is no doubt that there is a major sense of urgency at Hopeville. The consequences have become a joke to many of the students here. They do not seem to mind the suspensions.

The parent of a seventh grader agreed:

That is right. They see out of school suspensions as a vacation. It also inconveniences working parents. It really makes no sense to send them home. We must find a better solution.

A sixth grade teacher explained:

The point is to hold their parents accountable for their inappropriate behaviors. It is unfair that we must deal with their abuse all day long.

The parent of an eighth grader stated:

I am the parent of a child who has been on the honor roll since first grade. I do not send her here to be distracted and threatened by these awful students. I did my job as a parent and I expect all parents to do the same. This school has a very bad name.

The parent of the seventh grade student stated:

It's no wonder why people sympathize with me when they find out that my son attends Hopeville. The bad behavior of the students here gives the school a very bad reputation.

One of the students on the coalition mentioned:

It is so bad here they will probably close this school. That will be very sad because I have been here since kindergarten. I am friends with almost all the seventh and eight grade students so I can talk to them about the condition of our school.

Coalition expectations. As depicted in Figure 1, the vision was to successfully implement single-gender classes in the middle grades at Hopeville Community School. The values and beliefs of the organization were that all students are capable of learning and achieving their goals and aspirations. The mission included the assurance that every student is entitled to effective and meaningful learning experiences so that they are prepared to thrive in a global society. The multiple needs identified for implementation included addressing the academic disengagement, improving student level of comfort, enhancing student self-efficacy, improving relationships between student and teacher as well as student to student, and transforming negative behavior in order to reduce the level

of infractions and suspensions. The plan of action generally focused on the

implementation of this initiative so that it may set the stage for a paradigm shift. It called

for all stakeholders to be invested in innovative and practical teaching strategies,

disciplinary policies, and effectual and consequential activities to engage the most

reluctant middle school student.

A veteran teacher inquired about the history of single-gender classes:

> With all the other changes that we are bombarded with, what makes single-gender classes so different or special?

An activity teacher exclaimed:

> I am willing to do whatever it takes to stop this cycle of failure. I believe in this initiative and I am willing to do my part. It has to work!

The vice principal contended:

> It could not get any worse. That is why this initiative deserves a chance. I am sure the separation will change the behaviors of many of the students. They can make believe they are in a fraternity or a sorority. That should be exciting!

The representative from central office suggested:

> Since this is new to Hopeville and no one here has any experience with this program, I think that we should visit a school where single-gender has been successfully implemented.

In addition to planning the initiative of experimental single-gender classes and

creating the guiding coalition, there was the need for teachers to share their insights on

the initiative. Without buy-in from essential collaborators such as teachers, any reform

effort no matter how well-intentioned and envisaged may not be successful. When good

ideas are well received by a few teachers, the support of others is necessary if the ideas

are implemented (Fullan, 2007).

Implementation. While the initiative was well received by the majority of the stakeholders at Hopeville, many had doubts and were quite apprehensive. Initially, several male students resented the fact that their classes were named after colleges as opposed to football and basketball teams since many of them aspired to be professional athletes. Many of the female students stated that they would rather have their classes named after female entertainers and groups. Like their teachers, many of the students were embarassed about the dismal performance of the students at Hopeville and the bad reputation that it had gained over the years. They candidly discussed their disgust with the situation of their school and were appreciative of the fact that they were represented on the coalition to implement single-gender classes. Bagin and Gallagher (2001) commented, "Schools have learned that students will make their views known even when school officials haven't asked for them" (p. 113).

A male student stated:

I don't know anything about any of those colleges, one day I will be a forward for the Knicks, that's why we should have been named after that team.

The vice principal declared:

It's cool! You could play ball in college. Don't worry about it. You could get used to it.

 A female student remarked:

I like the idea. I think it's great to have our class named after Clark Atlanta University. I may even go there after high school.

A seventh grade female added:

I am glad that we were represented on the team. The adults usually forget to include us. They are beginning to understand that we have a lot to offer.

When students buy in, there is a commitment to excellence as well as the inspiration to do well in school. It also fosters a classroom atmosphere that is conducive to student engagement. When students are motivated, they are encouraged to become critical-thinkers and problem-solvers who take risks, work collaboratively with others, participate in class, welcome challenges, and engage in goal setting activities. As they became aware of the fact that the two student representatives on the coalition recommended that classes were named after colleges, they became more receptive and following a few weeks of implementation, were quite acclimated with their new titles.

At least 95% of the teachers and support staff embraced the proposal and expressed their contentment and enthusiasm for the initiative. During faculty and grade level meetings, they made comparisons between the male and female students and expressed interest in gaining information regarding brain based research so as to gain more insight on strategies which could effectively meet the needs of each gender. During weekly articulation meetings with middle school teachers they also requested professinal develoment in strategies to differentiae instruction to meet the educational needs of both genders and expressed interest in improving their classroom management skills. As a result of their interest and curiosity, book studies were facilitated and information gained was applied to the instructional practices. LouAnne Johnson's book titled *Teaching Outside the Box* was the first of many which was a tool kit that offered effective strategies to motivate difficult students. One practice involved providing more "hands on" opportunities and project based activities since these were more likely to capture the focus and engagement of male students. It was obvious that they were genuienly committed to tailoring their instructional practices to meet the needs of their students.

A teacher offered her comments on the initiative:

> I am committed to improving my practice because I understand that change begins with me and the other adults at Hopeville. When we change, our students will change.

An activity teacher added:

> If it will take single-gender classes to improve things around here, then I am all for it and you all should be also. It really makes sense people! Let's give it a try.

One of the new middle school teachers agreed:

> I am so excited about this initiative. I have so many plans for each group. I need to become more familiar with the gender differences.

A veteran teacher stated:

> I had absolutely no idea that boys and girls learned differently. I need to know so that I can adjust and differentiate my delivery of instruction.

During the implementation phase, teachers engaged in self reflection activities and became more cognizant of the important role they played in the performance of their students. They candidly discussed their personal challenges and vowed to make changes. Throughout grade level meetings, members of the coalition led discussions and reiterated the sense of urgency and the importance of working assiduously to align their actions with the vision of the school. Their ideas and suggestions were well received by their colleagues. As a result of a genuine commitment and desire to transform Hopeville, there was a noticeble increase in collaboration among staff.

A veteran teacher remarked:

> Our students need to know that we are here to help them.

Another teacher commented:

> If we work together and share ideas and best practices, we can make a difference in the lives of our students. First we have to collaborate more and see ourselves as learners.

A sixth grade teacher voiced her opinion:

> We have to be good role models for them and we must make a genuine attempt to treat them with the utmost respect.

The vice principal immediately made the following suggestion:

> The weekly faculty meetings as well as the days allotted for staff development can be used to discuss ideas and plan activities that would improve our practice.

The central office representative agreed:

> Sounds like a good plan. Only when we improve our practice will we be able to make a difference in the lives of our students. This is absolutely necessary.

The vice principal continued:

> We should begin with classroom management strategies. I believe that is a prerequsite to improving student behavior, academic engagement, and ultimately student academic achievement.

> Consequently, teachers began to share ideas and engage in rich and meaningful

discussions regarding the improvement of their own practices. Discussions were candid

and sincere. Regardless of failed initiatives and bouts of disappointment, even the

marginal teachers appeared to have been rejuvernated and were genuienly determined to

positively influence the learning experiences of their students. Throughout observations

conducted at the site, teachers were seen preparing and planning for instruction, sharing

ideas and strategies, and collaborating with activity teachers and the media specialist to

ensure cross content curricular activities.

Bernhardt (2002) concurred,

> Because many of these individuals have been through such processes before, the facilitator must appeal to the hearts of the staff members to enter this process one more time for the benefit of all children. One could remind participants why they became teachers in the first place. The majority of our most effective teachers would say the reason they became teachers was to make a difference in the lives of children. (p. 103)

Members of the coliation continued to communicate the vision to stakeholders. During bi-weekly faculty meetings with the general staff, time was allotted to provide and receive feedback from stakeholders regarding issues, challenges, and suggestions concerning the implementation of single-gender experimental classes. Additionally, four information sessions were conducted to keep parents and members of the community abreast of all details following the implementation process. During the first session, the parent of a sixth grader commented:

> I am glad that someone took the time to let me know what is going on with this school and what you all are trying to do. I have been asking questions since my child was in the third grade and everything was always a big secret. I need to know everything about this new program.

The grandmother of a seventh grader added:

> The separation will be good for my grandson. I believe that he will be able to concentrate on his lessons since he is away from those girls.

Another parent exclaimed:

> I will support the single-gender classes but I honestly don't think it will make much of a difference. These kids are too grown. They have no interest in school.

The father of a seventh grader added:

> I have one of the worst kids at Hopeville but that doesn't mean that I will give up on him. We must unite and support our kids! Let's give single-gender classes a try. Let's work with the school and support the teachers.

Price (2002) emphasized the importance of parental involvement and partnership with the school. "Parents have a huge stake in making sure their youngsters take school seriously and providing them with the necessary guidance and support at home, so they can pass these high-stakes tests" (p. 132). Parental and community engagement that are linked to student learning has a greater effect on achievement than more general forms of involvement. Effective involvement should be meaningful and focused on improving

achievement, designed to engage families and students in developing specific knowledge and skills.

Three weeks later, the second session was planned to discuss the facilitation of professional development for understanding research based gender differences, best practices, and effective teaching strategies. It was decided that the principal of a nearby school that had successfully implemented single-gender education classes would be invited to share her insights and experiences with the stakeholders at Hopeville. During the third session, a book study was also conducted on Michael Gurian's Book titled *Boys and Girls Learn Differently*. During this meeting teachers also reflected on their practices. In the month of May, during the fourth session, the following questions were developed and utilized to guide discussions that occurred during the planning period in Cycle I.

1. What were teachers perceptions regarding the initiative?

2. What type of strategies could be implemented to encourage and sustain student and parent "buy in" to the initiative?

3. What were the intended outcomes?

4. How many students will be involved in single-gender classes?

5. How will the groups be configured?

6. What type of staff development would be utilized to sustain teachers and support staff?

7. What was the duration of the study?

Strategic planning determined where the organization was going over the next year and how it was going to get there. The focus of a strategic plan was the successful

implementation of single-gender classes at Hopeville Community School. The way that

this strategic plan was developed depended on the nature of the organization's leadership,

culture of the organization, complexity of the school's environment, size of the

organization, and expertise of members of the coalition. Goals-based planning began with

a focus on the school's mission and vision, goals to work toward the mission, strategies

to achieve the goals, and action planning. Issues-based strategic planning began by

examining issues facing the organization, strategies to address those issues and action

plans. Responses to the questions were insightful, continuous and meaningful however,

only the most important ones were highlighted.

Question 1: What were teachers' perceptions regarding the initiative?

I speak to the other teachers everyday and a few of us even meet on the weekends. The conversation is always about the incessant failure and problems at Hopeville. Many of us are simply fed up with the continuous failure. We have witnessed hundreds of failed initiatives but we are willing to give single-gender classes a try. Just provide the appropriate staff development so that we will be in a position to make informed decisions. (Activity teacher)

The initiative sounds feasible to the needs of the students at Hopeville. I believe that the separation may encourage them to be more focused and engaged. That will positively influence student achievement. I am optimistic. (Veteran Teacher)

Question 2: What type of strategies could be implemented to encourage and

sustain student and parent "buy in" to the initiative?

I think that we are headed in the right direction. Choosing students and parents to be members of the coalition sent a positive message that their values and opinions are valued. They can be very instrumental as we seek "buy in" from all stakeholders. (Guidance Counselor)

That's right! It's a matter of the respect and value that you place on our ideas, opinions and talents. We appreciate the opportunity. This has never been done before and my child has been attending Hopeville since the second grade. (Eighth Grade Parent)

Question 3: What were the intended outcomes?

The goal is to make Hopeville a better school for all students. When we begin to put them first, be supportive, and demonstrate the faith and confidence we have in them, we will see a major difference. (Vice Principal)

You are right! They have to know that we believe in them. They are the leaders of tomorrow. (A Parent)

Question 4: How many students will be involved in single-gender classes?

We already decided that the entire middle school cohort will participate in single-gender classes. (Guidance Counselor)

All middle school students will participate in the initiative and there are no coed classes. (Activity Teacher)

Question 5: How will the groups be configured?

We should simply separate all the students in each grade level and place them in the classrooms. For example, since there is a total of four sixth grade classrooms, all sixth grade girls will be divided into two sixth grade classes and the boys could be placed in the other two sixth grade classes. The same would be done for the seventh and eighth grade students. (Veteran Teacher)

The key is to name each group of students. The names must be catchy and hip and students must be able to make a connection to the name of their respective group. (Student Representative)

Question 6: What type of staff development would be utilized to sustain teachers

and support staff?

If we are serious about this initiative, teachers and support staff must received extensive professional development. That is non-negotiable! I don't want to talk about my colleagues but many of them need to learn how to respect our students, manage their classrooms, teach better, and improve their skills. (New Teacher)

There is money in the budget to pay teachers to participate in staff development workshops and during the months of July and August. (Vice Principal)

During the summer we can also look for free workshops and any type of materials so that we may all be better informed. (Central Office Representative)

Question 7: What was the duration of the study?

The research study on the implementation of single-gender classes was to be conducted for one school year. We should begin in September of 2009 to June, 2010. (Researcher)

Coalition reflection. Only when these issues are addressed in their entirety the possibility exists that student academic performance will be positively influenced. It is imperative that the commitment is made to implement interventions and strategies to help ensure that all students can develop the basic psychological tools they need to succeed in school, work, relationships, and families of their own. Reeves (2006) agreed, "If the only objective is to improve test scores, it's much faster and easier to have underperforming students drop out of school than to craft effective intervention programs for them" (p. 2).

During this cycle, members of the coalition were also engaged in selfreflection activities and discussions regarding their perception of single-gender classes. Wheatley (1999) concurred, "In humans, self-reference becomes more complex because of capabilities that differentiate us from most other species. We possess consciousness and are capable of reflection. We are able to think about a past and a future" (p. 147). Important information was acquired regarding their attitudes toward their students and their level of expectation.

An activity teacher declared:

Our school and our students have the worse reputation in the district but I have faith in them. If we improve our practice and our behavior, we will see a major difference. That is the least that we can do for them.

The new teacher agreed:

It is imperative that we take a good look at ourselves. It is important that we work cohesively toward the vision of the school. We have to meet regularly and engage in meaningful and productive discussions.

The vice principal added:

> The key is to align our actions with the vision that we have created for Hopeville. We must be consistent! There is no time to waste!

The guidance counselor advised:

> Our students are quite capable of learning. They are hungry for knowledge and they crave discipline and guidance.

Several themes and patterns emerged from the planning and brainstorming sessions. The major theme stemmed from the teachers' concern and devastation regarding the continuous academic disengagement of the middle school students in grades 6, 7, and 8. They were all quite despondent over their dismal performance on state, district, and teacher created assessments. Increased suspensions, discipline infractions, and violent behavior toward peers and classmates also emerged as a major concern. Student self-efficacy was also a major concern for the teachers.

A veteran teacher stated:

> There is a definite connection between the behavior, attitude, and bleak performance of our students. This is truly depressing and disheartening. Many days I question my decision to become a teacher.

A new teacher expressed concern:

> Two weeks ago eight of my students were suspended in 1 day. When they returned their behavior had gotten worse. We must find a way out of this cycle. It is absolutely brutal! I crave the opportunity to teach. That's all, just teach my students.

An activity teacher commented,

> It is a waste to do lesson plans because I cannot even get through one lesson. That is simply unacceptable! Some days I feel so useless.

The guidance counselor postulated:

> If we provide them with interesting and meaningful learning experiences, they will be engaged. It is important to design coherent instruction and a lot of hands-on activities. Just keep the faith!

The general consensus was that there was indeed a sense of urgency regarding the performance middle school students at Hopeville Community School. Despite the fact that the teachers were previously involved with several failed initiatives, the fact that they were now directly involved in the decision making process was the defining factor and the main reason for their level of enthusiasm. Teaching has historically been a profession that granted practitioners some degree of autonomy in their classrooms, but larger institutional decisions affecting their work were still controlled by administrators and policymakers. Everything from lesson planning, purchasing of textbooks, curriculum, instructional strategies, grading, and staff development are often in the hands of others. An activity teacher remarked:

> With directives coming to us left and right, we have lost control of our classrooms.

A veteran teacher alleged:

> In the past their talents and ideas were ignored and rejected by administration. I just sat quietly and waited for each initiative to fade away. Eventually they all did as quickly as they were forced upon us. It's just a pleasure to be able to make a decision in this place.

Another middle school teacher commented:

> It is great to be a part of a team that has a vested interest in our school and our students.

They felt as if they had finally received the authorization and sanction necessary to be more involved and to make a difference in the lives of their students. The importance of teacher empowerment in key education areas cannot be underestimated. A

belief by teachers that their knowledge of teaching and learning matters and is considered

a valuable factor in decision-making can connect them to their schools, students, and

districts in powerful ways. They were enthusiastic about efforts to transform the school

and agreed that the implementation of single-gender classes was a feasible option

worthwhile of their time and efforts.

A nontenured teacher added:

> I have a good feeling about this program, you can count on me!

Another mentioned:

> Single-gender classes may just be the answer to our prayers. It would be nice to witness a change at Hopeville. I was beginning to think that the name should be changed to Hopeless.

The guidance counselor pointed out:

> I like your spirit. Only if we can demonstrate that in our actions and that positive attitude can be replicated by our students. I definitely believe that there is hope for us.

A veteran teacher suggested:

> While all initiatives have failed, I am optimistic that single-gender classes will benefit our students. I am sure that they will welcome the separation. All I ask is that we receive the necessary support and opportunities to collaborate and share ideas and strategies.

From the qualitative study emerged the importance of teacher collaboration and

opportunities for them to share their insights and opinions. Faculty meetings provided

time for meaningful discussions, which facilitated staff understanding of research based

strategies regarding single-gender classes. Teachers discussed their perceptions,

apprehensions, and optimism for the initiative. Using discussions as a prerequisite for

teaching also encouraged and stimulated critical thinking. Vygotsky (1962) stressed the

importance of dialogue and discussion as a decisive component of growth. He believed that dialogue with others facilitates development and capacity building.

Findings from student presingle-gender survey. During their 1st week of participating in single-gender classes, the presurvey was administered to students. Valuable data were gained regarding student perspective and the feasibility of single-gender classes. Themes and patterns emerged regarding Student Behavior, Self-Efficacy, Academic Performance, Relationships with Peers and Teachers, Student Academic Engagement, and Student Comfort Level in single-gender classes.

Student behavior (SB*).* Table 1 revealed important data regarding student behavior. Question 5(h) *I am a motivated student who does my best and follows the rules of my school* and 5(i) *My teachers will describe me as a discipline problem in the classroom,* yielded findings which corroborated with data gathered during observations and during conversations with teachers, students, and parents which will be discussed in detail within later cycles. The issues regarding student behavior prior to their participation in single-gender classes was also depicted in Discipline Atoms (Appendix J).

As shown in Table 1, a total of 64.2% of students agreed that they are motivated students who follow the rules of the school. That left a percentage of 35.7% of middle school students who admitted to being discipline problems. Likewise in question 5(i), over one third or 33.3% of the students agreed that their teachers will describe them as discipline problems. These findings confirmed teacher concern for student behavior. Behavior problems can cripple the education process. If inappropriate classroom behavior is not appropriately addressed by a skilled educator, even the grades of high achieving

students will plummet as a result of the continuous disruptions. By instituting behavior modification programs, teachers and administrators are able to regain control of their schools and ensure that learning opportunities are abundant.

Student self-efficacy (SE*).*The self-efficacy of students was also scrutinized in this study. Questions 5(e) *Performing well in school is important to me* and 5(f) *My teachers will describe me as a student who works hard to complete assignments* examined the self-efficacy of participants. As indicated in Table 1, during presingle-gender survey, responses indicated only 73.8% agreed that performing well in school was important to them while 19% disagreed that performing well was important to them. Similar findings were noted with the responses to question 5(f). As depicted in Table 1, student responses to this question during presingle-gender classes illustrated 28.6% of the students did not believe that teachers would describe them as students who worked hard to complete their assignments. A total of 59.5% agreed, and the remaining students were neutral. Their responses substantiated teachers' concern and anxiety regarding student self-efficacy. Students' attitudes and beliefs are regarded as precursors of behaviors and efforts. Students with positive attitudes are more likely to sustain their efforts and have the desire to be involved in the learning tasks

Student academic performance (SAP*).* Also described in Table 1 is valuable data regarding student academic performance (SAP) on district and teacher created assessments. Questions 5(c) *I get passing grades in more than half of my classes* and 5(d) *I perform well on tests and quizzes* both provide critical information regarding student academic achievement. Prior to participating in single-gender classes, approximately 50% of the students stated that they did not get passing grades in more

than one half of their classes. Those findings mirrored those gained from item 5(d). Prior

to their participation in single-gender classes, approximately 50% of middle school

students agreed that they did not perform well on test and quizzes. These findings support

the dismal performance of students on district and teacher created assessments. The

tracking of student academic performance fulfills a number of purposes. Areas of

achievement and failure in a student's academic career need to be evaluated in order to

foster improvement by addressing specific needs of students. Results provide a

framework for talking about how students fare in school, and the academic standards to

which all students are held.

Table 1

Student Behavior, Self-Efficacy, and Academic Performance

Time	Item		Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
Pre (5h)	I am a motivated student who does my best and follows the rules of my school	Count	6	9	0	19	8
		Percent	14.3%	21.4%	.0%	45.2%	19.0%
Pre (5i)	My teachers will describe me as a discipline problem in the classroom	Count	18	8	2	9	5
		Percent	42.9%	19.0%	4.8%	21.4%	11.9%
Pre (5e)	Performing well in school is important to me	Count	4	4	3	16	15
		Percent	9.5%	9.5%	7.1%	38.1%	35.7%
Pre (5f)	My teachers will describe me as a student who works hard to complete assignments	Count	5	7	5	17	8
		Percent	11.9%	16.7%	11.9%	40.5%	19.0%
Pre (5c)	I get passing grades in more than half of my classes	Count	9	10	0	15	8
		Percent	21.4%	23.8%	.0%	35.7%	19.0%
Pre (5d)	I perform well on tests and quizzes	Count	10	9	0	15	8
		Percent	23.8%	21.4%	.0%	35.7%	19.0%

Student relationships with peers (SRWP*).* The interactions among peers in the classroom are a normal and essential part of the learning process that influences the lifelong learning habits of students. The potential effects of peer relationships are reciprocal and some students are more receptive than others. Important data regarding student relationships with peers were gathered in item 6(e). As indicated in Table 2, during the completion of pre single-gender survey, 40.5 % of the participants stated that they were not satisfied with the relationships with their peers. Findings clearly indicate that students were not satisfied with the relationships with their classmates. Some children behave in an aggressive or disruptive manner and, hence, are rejected by peers. Other children withdraw from peer interactions and, in this way, limit their ability to gain acceptance and friendship (Coie & Kupersmidt, 1983).

Table 2

Student Relationship with Peers and Teachers, Academic Engagement, and Level of Comfort

Time	Item		Not at all satisfied	Moderately satisfied	Extremely satisfied
Pre (6e)	My relationships with classmates	Count	17	18	7
		Percent	40.5%	42.9%	16.7%
Pre (6f)	My relationships with teachers	Count	17	18	7
		Percent	40.5%	42.9%	16.7%
Pre (6h)	My level of comfort in single-gender classes	Count	19	16	4
		Percent	48.7%	41.0%	10.3%
Pre (6j)	Overall satisfaction with single-gender classes	Count	22	13	1
		Percent	61.1%	36.1%	2.8%
Pre (6c)	My level of engagement	Count	13	20	9
		Percent	31.0%	47.6%	21.4%

Student relationships with teacher (SRWT). The same information was generated when investigating student relationships with teachers. As indicated in Table 2, question 6(f), prior to participating in single-gender classes, 40.5% of the participants were not satisfied with the relationships they shared with their teachers. These findings may also support the reason for student lack of academic engagement, dismal academic achievement, and escalating discipline infractions. Improving students' relationships with teachers has important, positive, and long-lasting implications for students' academic and social development. The teacher-student relationship is a very important aspect which significantly impacts the teaching-learning process. Positive student-teacher relationships improve the culture of any school. It is critical for schools that strive for effectiveness and student academic achievement to place great emphasis on the relationship that exists between student and teacher.

Student academic engagement (SAE). Item 6(c) of the Student Survey in Appendix D measured student academic engagement in classes. Table 2 displays findings from the presurvey, which indicated that approximately one third of the students were not at all satisfied with their level of engagement. Children who are engaged show sustained behavioral involvement in learning activities accompanied by a positive emotional tone. They select tasks at the border of their competencies, initiate action when given the opportunity, and exert intense effort and concentration in the implementation of learning tasks; they show generally positive emotions during ongoing action, including enthusiasm, optimism, curiosity, and interest. On the other hand, disaffected and disengaged students often do not make an effort and may give up easily in the face of

challenges. Findings from this survey reflected students' dismal performance on teacher created, district, and standardized assessments.

Student comfort level (SCL). A crucial aspect of this study explored student comfort level (SCL) in single-gender classes. As shown in Table 2, questions 6(h) and 6(j) generated important information so that the determination could be made. When initially asked about their level of comfort in single-gender classes, 48.7% reported that they were not at all satisfied. These findings were substantiated with those derived from item 6(j), when students were asked about their overall satisfaction with single-gender classes. The presingle-gender survey revealed 61.1% of respondents were not at all satisfied. Judging from the findings, the majority of middle school students were unhappy in single-gender classes. Emotionally safe schools are ones in which children take risks without fear of being ridiculed, and where they are challenged but not stressed. At these schools, discipline exists, but does not replace fun and interactive activities. This environment is also necessary if educators are to ensure student engagement, which may ultimately lead to favorable student academic achievement.

Cycle I summary of findings. Coalition meetings generated the creation of a shared vision and the establishing of intended outcomes. Themes and patterns included teamwork, concern for student academic achievement, student behavior, student engagement, and opportunities for staff to reflect on their practices. A strategic planning model produced seven guiding questions, which were used to guide discussions. A sense of urgency was established and members of the coalition were committed to the implementation of single-gender classes at Hopeville Community School.

Findings from student presingle-gender surveys revealed serious issues regarding student behavior, self-efficacy, and the lack of academic engagement, which led to students' dismal academic performance. Student relationships with peers and teachers were also areas of major concern for the coalition. Student level of comfort was also an area of concern since during the presurvey 61% of the students revealed their dissatisfaction regarding their placement in single-gender classes.

Cycle II Findings

Cycle II of the action research project provided the opportunity to execute the plan that was generated from the data revealed in Cycle I. The focus was to explore the impact of single-gender education on middle school students in Hopeville Community School. In order to appropriately evaluate the initiative, it was crucial that continuous dialogue was instigated with stakeholders who were affected by its implementation. This type of interview process was structured and students responded to 22 specific questions in the Student Interview Protocol (Appendix H). All points of interest were pursued and responses were elaborated upon by asking them to provide a brief explanation for their answers. The guidance counselor was instrumental in arranging the interviews. Despite the familiarity with many of the participants, I was able to maintain a netural opinion which strenghtened the validity of the research study.

It was also necessary to conduct observations of the participants in this setting. Observations of students were objective so that the information gathered was not skewed. Observational techniques were an important aspect of the action research study. Bias was eliminated and I was systemic and candid throughout the process. It was essential that my presence was aligned with the normal daily activities of the the participants. It was also

critical that my presence was as unobtrusive as possible since people behave differently in the presence of others. Specificity was also key because it paints a clear picture. Observations were accuratte, thorough, and scientific. Upon completion, sense was made of the data and fieldnotes that were collected. This led to the emergence of several themes.

Student interviews. One of the advantages of face-to-face or direct interviews was that I could adapt the questions as necessary, clarify doubt, and ensure that the responses were properly understood, by repeating or rephrasing the questions. Glesne (2006) described the interview process as an occasion which fosters a special interaction between the researcher and the participant. The researcher also picked up nonverbal cues from respondents. Any level of discomfort, anxiety, and issues that respondents experienced were detected through frowns, nervous tapping, and other body language, unconsciously displayed by any person. All of the comments were not positive, but the answers given were honest and transparent. The Student Interview Protocol in Appendix H was utilized and participants responded to all 22 questions.

Environmental factors (EF). Environmental factors include aspects that have a direct effect on students such as socioeconomics and family dynamics. During interviews students expounded on their responses and provided demographic information. One trend regarding environmental factors that immediately surfaced was that 72% of the students lived in single-parent households, which were led by the female parent while 1% of students resided in households lead by the father as the single parent. Exactly 15% of students resided in households led by a grandparent, 2% with both parents, 4% percent with relatives such as aunts or cousins, and the remaining 7% of the with a nonfamily

115

member such as a foster parent. The absence of a meaningful home-school collaboration is often cited as one of the major reasons for the lack of academic achievement among low-income students (Barbour, Barbour & Scully, 1997).

Question 22 of the Student Interview Protocol (Appendix H) asked respondents to reveal their career aspirations and provide a brief explanation for their choice. Despite their enthusiasm, it was revealed during the interviews that the majority of the participants lived in poverty. Gentle probing allowed them to divulge details regarding the fact that many of them found more solace in the school than at home with their families. Olsen and Fuller (2003) mentioned, "Because the students bring the effects of poverty with them to school, teachers must understand and deal with poverty and its consequence" (p. 279).

A female student said:

> I cannot wait to grow up and get a good job so that I can make sure that I have anything I want. I will make sure that they don't cut off my lights, heat, or water. The landlord told my grandma that he is not fixing anything in the house because my cousins keep breaking up stuff.

A seventh grade student yelled:

> I am tired of being broke. Everything in the house is broken. If school was opened on the weekend I will be here just to get away. I share a bedroom with my brother and four cousins.

They also openly discussed their dislike of the crime ridden community in which they resided. Several of the respondents spoke of a longing to visit neighborhood parks or to be able to play outside or to ride their bikes around the neighborhood. However, they were astutely aware of the daily shootings, robberies, and assaults in the community. These factors had a continuous adverse affect on the psychological well- being and the welfare of students. Further probing disclosed that they saw the main purpose of

obtaining an education was to acquire a good job that could afford them the financial

means to move out of the impoverished and unsafe community where they no longer

would have to live in fear of being killed by a stray bullet, robbed, run over by a stolen

vehicle, or forced into a gang. Olsen and Fuller (2003) made a sailent point:

> The lack of resources increases the chance that children will live in noisy, crime-ridden neighborhoods, or be more likely to live in neighborhoods that pose a threat from chemicals and pollution. The neighborhood is less likely to have libraries, organized recreational opportunities, and parks, and are more likely to have gangs. (p. 278)

A sixth grade female remarked:

> The teachers and the principal don't live in this horrible neighborhood so they will never understand. They live in nice neighborhoods and their kids go to the best schools. It is rough in this neighborhood. That's the reason why so many of the kids behave so badly when they come to school.

A seventh grade male student mentioned:

> I am a boy and I am scared of this neighborhood. I hate it here! It was not like this in South Carolina. I will continue to get into trouble so that my mother will send me back to South Carolina to live with my father.

A sixth grade girl exclaimed:

> My mother wouldn't even let me walk to the store. She said that there are too many thugs in this community. We will probably move next year. It is too dangerous around here.

Student behavior (SB). Canter and Canter (1993) describe characteristics of

difficult students. "Difficult students are the students who are continually disruptive,

persistently defiant, demanding of attention or unmotivated. They are the students who

defy your authority and cause you stress, frustration and anger" (p. 6). This definition

was applicable to 75% of the participants in this study. Questions 11 and 13 of the

Student Interview Protocol in Appendix H revealed valuable information about student

behavior. A look at student behavior revealed important information regarding the

117

deportment of the respondents. When asked about their behavior in school, a large number of the respondents stated that they had received an out-of-school suspension at least once during the past school year. Many of them reported that they had received out-of-school suspensions two or more times. A handful the respondents mentioned that they had never been suspended from school.

Student discipline infractions and acts of violence varied from physical assaults on teachers and classmates, defacing school property, cutting classes, and the use of profanity. No one seem to be embarrassed or overtly concerned about being suspended from school. Prior to the implementation of single-gender classes, the majority of middle school students at Hopeville believed that it was their right to retaliate whenever they felt that the teachers resorted to insult or reprimand them in the presence of others. Likewise, they saw the school as the playing field to settle quarrels and clashes with classmates, many of which originated in the neighborhood.

A student provided an explanation for the inappropriate behaviors of his peers:

> Sometimes parents fight with each other in the community, especially our mothers. If the parents fight then the kids will fight also. Teachers must realize that sometimes we may come to school with an attitude. Instead of harassing us and forcing us to complete assignments, the teachers need to get out of our faces.

A sixth grade girl added:

> We are in the hood so what do you expect? Being bad is fitting in with the other bad people in the hood and all the bad stuff that goes on here.

Student relationships with peers (SRWP). Nelson and Lott (2000) stated, "Teens need to work out their relationships with peers and find out if and how they fit in" (p. 9). Questions 6, 7, 8, and 17 (Appendix H) produced data regarding student relationships with their peers. As it related to student relationships with peers (SRWP), the trend that

was most pervalent was the competitive and cutthroat attitudes of a large number of the

participants. Each new girl or boy in the school or neighborhood was initially seen as a

rival who had arrived to cheat them out of attention from their teachers or from other

classmates with whom they had already established bonds and friendships. A few of the

female participants who candidly described themselves as being promiscuous and were

involved in sexual relationships with classmates mentioned that all female peers,

particularly those they thought were aesthetically pleasing, were immediately targeted

and labelled as competition, hence the reason for the distrust and abhorrence. Male

participants shared the same sentiments, but were more concerned with the competition

that derived from the athletic abilities of male classmates. Disagreements often spilled

over into the classrooms and led to physical altercations. Hence one of the reasons for the

escalated number of suspensions in the middle school grades.

A female student exclaimed:

> They just sparated the boys and girls so now I am in this all girl group that is
> named after Spelman College. I don't care to be around too many females because
> these chicks are shady. Anyway, I will try my best to get along with them. My
> principal said that I may actually develop strong friendships. I may even get to
> like the teachers.

A sixth grade girl stated:

> If they look at my boyfriend they will get a beat down. I don't care if I get
> suspended. It wouldn't be the first nor the last time.

An eighth grade male mentioned:

> I don't care who comes up here in Hopeville. Any dude that thinks that he could
> beat me on the court would get a serious beat down.

> It was obvious that conflict between students was a major factor in their lives. If

these conflicts are not monitored and appropriately addressed by competent and

responsible professionals they may manifest into larger issues. There was clearly a need

for the decision makers at Hopeville to provide students with strategies which would

encourage peaceful conflict resolution and mechanisms to accept and tolerate differences.

Within the classroom, time and organization can be established to focus students on their

learning. Pairing and grouping students by their devotion to academics, for example, may

benefit all involved. Those who value learning can share their enthusiasm and act as

mentors for those who have other priorities. Students who motivate themselves in

nonacademic directions can view and appreciate the choices of peer learners.

   Student relationships with teachers (SRWT). Questions 5 and 18 of the

Student Interview Protocol supplied important information regarding student

relationships with teachers (SRWT). When asked to discuss the relationship they shared

with their teachers, the findings indicated a lack of trust and respect for at least three of

the middle school teachers at the site and adoration and deference for the others. Greene

(2002) made a salient point,

> In an ideal world, the relationship between teachers and students would be
> harmonious, dynamic, productive, and mutualy rewarding. Teachers would love
> their profession and delight in working with children. They would be enthusiastic,
> skilled, creative, energetic, caring, and nurturing. In this ideal world, students
> would be eager to learn, motivated, goal directed, diligent, obedient, and
> cooperative. (p. 293)

   One persistent theme was the value students placed on their relationships with

teachers, both in the academic realm and beyond the walls of the school. There existed a

sense that caring and compassion had a direct correlation to the quality of the student

teacher relationship, the eminence of teaching and learning, and the self-efficacy of

students. Among the participants in the study, there was a general perception that

teachers were obligated to demonstrate genuine care and value for all students. Charles

(1989) postulated, "The ways in which groups and individuals in the classroom behave are greatly influenced by how they perceive the teacher" (p. 15).

A student explained the need for continuous support of school personnel:

> When I got the award for the most valuable player on the basketball team in the city, I invited all my teachers and no one came to see me. They all know that my father is in jail and mother is in Atlanta. I looked up at the bleachers and not even one teacher came to see me. They don't care about us because they have their own kids. As long as they get their paychecks, that's all they care about. If they had come out to support me, I would behave better in school but just like they don't care, I don't care.

One student commented,

> I just love my teachers except for two of them who are very mean. I have the cell phone number of my math teacher and I call her for help with my homework.

A male student declared:

> When I have good relationships with my teachers, I will learn more and behave better. If I feel as though they don't care about me, I would not give them any respect.

The topic of respect was another concern that surfaced during the interviews, particularly when discussing changes that may enhance students' academic engagement, self-efficacy, comfort level, and behavior. The most prevalent reproach as described by respondents was the teachers' alleged conscious or unconscious bias against certain students. Consequently, they believed that they were constantly picked on, harassed, reprimanded, yelled at, and disrespected by many of the middle school staff. Many of the participants described their individual misconduct and infractions as the most accessible means by which they felt that they could express their sense of injustice. Despite their tumultous home environment, a small percentage of students viewed suspensions as time away from the insults and constant nagging of their teachers.

A seventh grade student described her daily interactions with teachers:

I will continue to work hard because my teachers encourage me. They always remind me that the sky is the limit that is why I try my best to learn something new each day.

A sixth grade student exclaimed:

When my teachers tell me how much faith they have in me I behave better and work harder to complete my assignments.

Student self-efficacy(SE). Many of the middle school students in this study were optimistic about their educational future and life aspriations. Questions 14, 15, 16 and 19 of the Student Interview Protocol in Appendix H offered pertinent information regarding their self-efficacy (SE). Despite the fact that 82% admitted that they were not academically prepared for high school, they were confident that with the right setting and the support of caring and knowledgable adults, they would be successful in accomplishing their life goals and ambitions. They had already made the connection between the acquisition of an education as it pertains to their future goals and desired careers. The naming of classes after colleges had truly inspired many of the participants who had already conducted research on their respective college or university and were able to present facts and important information about them. Participants demonstrated a high sense of belief, resilience, and self-efficacy when they described their future aspirations and their determination to accomplish their goals. Charles (1989) contended,

Many authorities have investigated self-concept, defined as the overall opinion that each person holds about himself or herself. Those authorities are virtually unanimous in their conclusion that a strong positive self-concept emerges as one experiences frequent success and that is weakened by repeated failure. (p. 136)

Despite the limitations such as poverty, academic disengagement, teacher inefficiency, and limited parental involvement, their mindset depicted a sense of self-confidence and an innate ability to overcome obstacles and surpass expectations.

One student explained:

> I don't care what anybody thinks of me! I know that I will go to Clark Atlanta University and study hard to become a teacher and a cheerleader for the Dallas Cowboys. No one will stop me from being a star. You may even see me in a few videos. One day I may even be on Oprah!

A male student mentioned:

> I will become the most talented artist in the world. Soon you are going to see my art work all over the country and I will be getting paid!

A female student stated:

> Everyday my teachers remind me that I am a good student. That makes me work harder. One day I am going attend North Carolina Central University and work hard to become a school nurse and no one can stop me.

Student comfort level (SCL). Since single-gender classes were implemented throughout the entire middle school cohort, students were not given any other alternative. Parents supported the initiative and district leaders predicted that it would positively influence student achievement, engagement, and behavior. Questions 7, 9, 20 and 21 of the Student Interview Protocol in Appendix H offered data regarding student comfort level (SCL) in single-gender classes. Initially the students were somewhat apprehensive about the separation of the genders, however, they expressed optimism. The male respondents mentioned that they would miss "hiking" on the girls. They also said that they no longer felt obligated to impress the females. On the other hand, the female students felt that they could now be themselves and were no longer under the scrutiny of the boys. As time progressed, the common trend revealed a student level of comfort that was characterized by a growing sense of resilence, responsibility, and an elevated level of accountability for both teacher and student.

A sixth grade female student revealed:

> At first I did not like the idea of single-gender classes but as the weeks passed I realized that it is not that bad. I used to be embarassed because the boys would laugh at me when I gave the wrong answer. The girls don't even care. We help each other and no one has to worry if their answer is wrong.

A seventh grade boy explicated:

> I like the separation! Girls are too talkative and sensitive. They sit in the classroom and put on lip gloss all through the class and that was very distracting for some of us. In the all male groups we can have man-to-man discussions about anything and we don't have to worry about any one being sensitive.

An eighth grade boy agreed:

> I can finally focus and concentrate on my work. I can deal with those females after school.

Student academic engagement (SAE). Simply insisting or demanding students to engage themselves in their class work is not enough to motivate them. It is simple to observe the academic disconnect and lack of engagement when students are slumped in their chairs, not paying attention to the teacher, sleeping, not participating, or preoccupied with other activities. Downey (2003) noted, "Effective teachers use a variety of well-researched practices and methods to ensure student learning. They engage students in multiple–level learnings to ensure content acquisition and mastery as well as self-development, cognitive development, and metacognitive development" (p. 141). Question 4 of the Student Interview Protocol in Appendix H, revealed crucial information regarding student academic engagement (SAE). The pattern that emerged represented a paradigm shift regarding student academic engagement.

One student provided the reason for his initial lack of interest in classwork:

> Before I was so bored in my science class. I thought that we would do experiments and hands-on activities, instead we listen to the teacher talk through out the entire class. Since we were placed in single-gender classes and the

teachers are always going for training, it has gotten much better. Last week we dissected a cow's eye. Now that's what I am talking about! I hope that they don't go back to the old way of teaching.

A student discussed her level of engagement in single-gender classes:

It is like a competition in the girl group to see who can be the smartest. Many of the teachers make us work in cooperative groups and at the end of the lesson we have to present and share information. Everyone has to participate and pay attention so that we will do well on our tests.

In educational institutions success is measured by student academic performance, or how well students meet standards set out by the school, district, or the state department of education. With the level of accountability and mandates established by NCLB, schools are subjected to punitive consequences if students are unable to achieve academic progress. The importance of students performing well in school has gained national attention from parents, legislators, and government agencies. McLaren (2007) stated, "Based on annual test scores, NCLB prescribes an accountability schema, 'adequate yearly progress,' for every state in the nation that focuses on sanctions for failing schools" (p. 38).

Student academic performance (SAP). Question 12 of the Student Interview Protocol in Appendix H, investigated the impact on single-gender classes on student academic performance (SAP). Despite the fact that the scores on teacher created and district assessments remained dismal, the participants unanimously agreed that single-gender education had some positive effect on student achievement. The majority of them reported at least 10% increase in language arts, science, social studies, and mathematics. Data from parent and teacher surveys along with results from standardized assessments also corroborate this revelation.

Observations.

Student academic engagement (SAE). Initially the observations mirrored trends

derived from interviews and presurveys. The level of student academic engagement

(SAE) observed during the initial observations supported findings in the student

presurveys and student interviews. The first was conducted in the classroom of a new

teacher where, during the interviews, students described the teacher as a pushover.

Students' blatant disrespect and insolence was obvious within the first few minutes of the

observation. Many of them experienced an academic disconnect and remained unfocused

and uninterested throughout the lesson. Several were observed texting on their cellular

phones, one participant yawned loudly several times, and others proceeded to engage in

dialogue that had no connection to what was being taught. The teacher continued to

deliver instruction and focused on the four female students who, gathering from their

responses, were at the head of the class. The other students were determined to

continuously interrupt instruction and demand attention from the teacher.

One female student yelled:

> I hate this class because she is so boring. Plus I know this stuff already.

Another student joined in the conversation:

> I am going to sleep. She talks too much. I miss the boys. I am about to text my
> boyfriend.

Another stated:

> I cannot wait to get out of this class. This work is too boring and I am tired of
> sitting.

Student behavior (SB). As the observations continued, it was revealed that in at

least four of the middle school classrooms, instruction was continuously interrupted by

126

many students who obviously had no respect for the teachers. At this point, important

information was gathered regarding student behavior (SB). The transgressions ranged

from minor issues such as not raising one's hand, talking in class without permission, and

texting on the phone, to the more serious deportment issues such as fighting and the

brutal taunting of classmates who responded to the teacher's question incorrectly. It was

noted that a total of 23 minutes were spent witnessing a ferocious quarrel between the

teacher and one of the male students who was caught chewing gum. As a result of the

power struggle between the teacher and the student, valuable instructional time was lost

and the student verbalized his intention to become more hostile and rebellious. The

teacher eventually called security who escorted the student to the vice principal's office.

A follow-up revealed that the student received a 2 day out of school suspension.

The teacher stated:

> These kids are so disrespectful. If they have no interest in learning then they
> should stay at home! I am in charge of this class and I do not allow anyone to
> chew gum in here.

A student responded loudly:

> I chew gum because I don't care about your stupid rules.

Another student contended:

> Stop fooling yourself lady, we run this joint!

The teacher replied:

> You all need to adjust your bad attitudes and make better choices. You gain
> nothing by being disrespectful.

Discipline problems in classrooms at Hopeville became a major issue for teachers

because they seriously consumed a quantity instructional time and destroyed even the

best of lesson plans. Children are incredibly perceptive in detecting a "push-over," and

will run rampant over a new teacher who is not confident in his or her ability to effectively manage the class. Another possible reason for this high incidence of student behavioral issues lies partly in the fact that the students did not have the tools to express themselves verbally when they became angry.

A major difference was noticed 6 weeks later during an observation of an eighth grade classroom. The teacher stood at the doorway of the classroom and smiled tentatively as she greeted the group of male students. She reminded them that they were the prestigious Morehouse Men and playfully nudged each student as he entered the classroom. The students sat in cooperative groups of four and, with minimal direction, proceeded to work cohesively to complete a project that they had begun the previous day. The teacher facilitated the groups and continuously praised and encouraged her students. It was obvious that trust and respect had already been established and sustained. This particular teacher was neither permissive nor autocratic. She provided firm guidance and leadership by establishing rules and consequences. She motivated the students from within and in addition to maintaining order, she allowed students to take ownership of their learning. At the closing of the lesson, as the students exited the classroom, their departure was launched by a succession of praises and well wishes for the remainder of the day.

The teacher said:

> Remember you are the prestigious Morehouse Men. You have a reputation to uphold. You are setting a good example for everyone else at this school.You are all aware of the importance of making healthy and responsible choices. If you choose not to, you must be prepared to face the consequences. I am confident that you will do the right thing. Enjoy the remainder of your day and don't forget to do your homework!

A few students responded:

> Don't worry we are cool. We know what to do.

An eighth grade student chimed in:

> Thank you, I love you. I will complete the homework as soon as I get home. At the end of the day I will help you with the classroom library then I will carry the crates to your car.

The next observation replicated that of the previous one. It also proved that encouragement was one of the crucial elements that conveys teacher respect and belief in students' abilities. Once again students were cordially greeted and addressed by the name of the university to which they were named after. A student-centered classroom facilitated a sense of responsibility and opportunities to work interdependently. As they worked in classroom centers the emergence of student leaders was quite evident. When two female students were engaged in a minor squabble, the teacher quickly redirected the inappropriate behavior in an inconspicuous manner. She then directed them toward a corner of the classroom and engaged in a brief and discreet conversation. Prior to the end of the class, students completed exit tickets and proceeded to form an orderly line in the hallway to transition to the next class.

She praised and reminded them of their position in the school:

> Remember you are the Spelman Sisters, the first ladies of our school. Let your actions be reflective of your title. Remember to be respectful and humble at all times. Others are watching you.

The group of female students responded:

> Yes we are indeed and we will be the best that we can be.

Several weeks later, as the following observation was conducted, it was noted that many of the students beamed with pride as they wore jerseys and teeshirts which

portrayed the names of their respective colleges and universities. The students stood in organized lines in the hallway as they patiently awaited directions from their teachers. Except for a few "cat calls" and heckles as the females passed by, there was obvious competition amongst the groups to see which gender, university, or college would be the recepients of the most accolades. No tangible rewards or prizes were promised in exchange for the desired behaviors. Verbal praise, acknowledgement, and elevated levels of expectancy were sufficient to motivate them to make responsible behavioral choices.

During lunch in the cafeteria the genders attempted to socialize and engage in conversation. Amid the strident laughter and deafening chatter, respectful and gregarious interactions were detected. Students embraced each other and inquired about single-gender education among other topics. Groups were addressed by the name of the respective college or university they represented. Initially they ignored directives from cafeteria supervisors regarding the policy which required them to sit on opposites sides of the cafeteria. As weeks passed by and observations continued, students reluctantly returned to their respective sections of the cafeteria and vowed to request a change of policy regarding the separation of the genders in the cafeteria. Consequently, representatives of the Morehouse and Spelman teams wrote a letter requesting that the policy was abolished. After careful consideration by the administrative staff, the policy to separate the genders in the cafeteria was eradicated in exchange for students utilizing their indoor voices and conducting themselves in a respectful manner. The students were elated over their victory and successful negotiations. As a result of their victory, the Morehouse Men and the Spelman Sisters emerged as the two groups at the apex of the middle school classes.

Student comfort level (SCL). Subsequent observations revealed an ampliflied student comfort level (SCL) in single-gender classes and school in general. There was a definite sense of community in the room as evidenced by the repartee between the students and the respect shown to one another. Students had a sense of pride in the school and were dertermined to honor the colleges and universities they represented. They cheerfully engaged in conversations and obviously enjoyed the company of one another. As she walked pass a seventh grader joyfully greeted a group of girls:

Hey Clark Atlanta Sisters! I miss you all. Save me a seat in the cafeteria at lunch.

A member of the group responded:

What's up Ms. Bethune Cookman College, your hair is real cute!

Another cheerfully said:

Call me later, a group of us is planning to go to the movies on Saturday.

On his way to the bathroom, a male student stopped to greet the female students:

What's going on everybody? We are going to shoot some ball after school. You all should come and hang with us.

During grade level and faculty meetings teachers and support staff continued to focus on the improvement of classroom management and the importance of establishing caring relationships with their students. The book titled *Discipline with Dignity* by Curwin, Mendler, and Mendler (1999) was used as a guide and model to which classroom practices would be aligned. During observations, teachers were seen implementing the strategies which called for many of them to establish an affirming approach and correct antecendent conditions that may contribute to poor student behavior, attitude, and academic disconnect. Downey (2003) agreed,

Teachers are the prime deliverers of the mission of the school system. They are the "firing line" officers charged with the primary responsibility to deliver the learning specified by the system. Teachers need to receive and participate in ongoing training as part of reaching the system's goals and of achieving the school's improvement plan. Teachers are the most important group in the organization in terms of the organization accomplishing its goals. (p. 182)

During the final observation, orderly lines of students were seen walking through the hallways of the school without the supervision of an adult. When questioned about the absence of the adults, the students were offended and stated that they were responsible and trustworthy young ladies and gentlemen who were capable of making healthy and responsible choices. The evidence was clear that encouraging students to pursue multiple and complementary achievement and social goals positively affected their level of comfort, self-efficacy, and behavior. Establishing an empowering school environment, facilitating and enabling students to fulfill their need for control and belonging is linked with a need for power and responsibility for their actions.

Cycle III Findings

Student postsurvey.

During this cycle, students also completed a postsingle-gender survey (Appendix D). Survey research can be described as one of the most important areas of measurement in applied social research. Students completed surveys in the privacy of their homes and were given an entire week to complete them. This unobtrusive way of measurement provided valuable data regarding students' attitude and experiences following a year of participating in single-gender classes. Table 3 displays the results of the survey.

Table 3

Student Behavior, Self-Efficacy, and Academic Performance

Time	Item		Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
Post (5h)	I am a motivated student who does my best and follows the rules of my school	Count	0	4	3	18	17
		Percent	.0%	9.5%	7.1%	42.9%	40.5%
Post (5i)	My teachers will describe me as a discipline problem in the classroom	Count	23	14	1	4	0
		Percent	54.8%	33.3%	2.4%	9.5%	.0%
Post (5e)	Performing well in school is important to me	Count	0	1	1	10	25
		Percent	.0%	2.7%	2.7%	27.0%	67.6%
Post (5f)	My teachers will describe me as a student who works hard to complete assignments	Count	0	4	5	18	15
		Percent	.0%	9.5%	11.9%	42.9%	35.7%
Post (5c)	I get passing grades in more than half of my classes	Count	1	8	1	18	10
		Percent	2.6%	21.1%	2.6%	47.4%	26.3%
Post (5d)	I perform well on tests and quizzes	Count	1	8	4	12	13
		Percent	2.6%	21.1%	10.5%	31.6%	34.2%

Student behavior (SB). Table 3 revealed findings from the post survey regarding student behavior. Question 5(h) *I am a motivated student who does my best and follows the rules of my school* and 5(i) *My teachers will describe me as a discipline problem in the classroom,* indicate a major improvement in student behavior following their experience in single-gender classes. As shown in Table 3, question 5(h) provided information about student behavior. A total of 83.4% of respondents agreed that they are motivated, and do their best and follow the rules of the school. During presingle-gender surveys, in their initial responses as shown in Table 1, 64% of students agreed that they

are motivated individuals who follow the rules of the school. Findings clearly indicated an increase of 19.4%. In response to question 5(i), during the postsurvey 98.1% of the middle school students disagreed that their teachers described them as discipline problems in the classroom. As revealed in Table 1, students' initial responses to the same item indicated that 61.9% disagreed with the statement. That constituted a 36.2% decrease in the number of students who believed that their teachers viewed them as discipline problems. Findings clearly revealed student participation in single-gender classes had positively influenced student behavior.

       Student self-efficacy (SE). Student self-efficacy was also scrutinized in this study. Questions 5(e) *Performing well in school is important to me* and 5(f) *My teachers will describe me as a student who works hard to complete assignments* examined the self-efficacy of participants. As indicated in Table 3, when postsingle-gender responses were compared the following findings emerged. In item 5(e), when asked if performing well in school was important to them, 94.6% of the students agreed with the statement. When compared to findings in presingle-gender surveys, 73.8% agreed to reveal a 20.8% increase. Responses to question 5(f), as depicted in Table 3, which asked if teachers will describe them as individuals who work hard to complete assignments revealed 88.6% of students agreeing with the statement. Prior to their participation in single-gender classes only 59% of students agreed with the statement. When a comparison was made between preresponses and postresponses, findings revealed a 29.6% increase. The conclusion can be made that participating in single-gender classes had significantly increased student self-efficacy.

Student academic performance (SAP). Also described in Table 3 are valuable

data regarding student academic performance. Questions 5(c) *I get passing grades in*

more than half of my classes and 5(d) *I perform well on tests and quizzes* both provide

critical information regarding student academic performance. Postsingle-gender survey

findings for item 5(c) indicated 73.7% of students agreeing with the statement.

 Presingle-gender findings indicated that 54.7% of students agreed with the statement

revealing a difference of 19%. For question 5(d) regarding their performance on teacher

and district created assessments, 65.8% of students agreed with the statement following 1

year in single-gender classes. When compared with findings from presingle-gender

survey responses as shown in Table 1, only 54.7% of students agreed with the statement.

That indicates a miniscule increase of 11.1%. Despite the fact that minimal progress had

been made, student academic performance following a year in single-gender classes

remained dismal.

Student relationships with peers (SRWP). As shown in Table 4, following the

completion of postsingle-gender surveys, 16.7% of the participants stated that they were

not satisfied with the relationships with their peers. This information was generated from

question 6(e) on the Student Survey in Appendix D. Presingle-gender responses to the

same item generated results that 40% of students were not satisfied with the relationships

with their peers. When compared, data clearly indicated that the relationships that

students shared with their peers had improved considerably following a year of

participating in single-gender classes. Table 4 displays these relationships.

Table 4

Student Relationships with Peers, Teachers, Level of Engagement, and Level of Comfort

Time	Item		Not at all satisfied	Moderately satisfied	Extremely satisfied
Post (6e)	My relationships with classmates	Count	7	17	18
		Percent	16.7%	40.5%	42.9%
Post (6f)	My relationships with teachers	Count	1	23	18
		Percent	2.4%	54.8%	42.9%
Post (6h)	My level of comfort in single-gender classes	Count	8	11	22
		Percent	19.5%	26.8%	53.7%
Post (6j)	Overall satisfaction with single-gender classes	Count	7	12	23
		Percent	16.7%	28.6%	54.8%
Post (6c)	My level of engagement	Count	3	22	17
		Percent	7.1%	52.4%	40.5%

Student relationships with teachers(SRWT). As indicated in Table 4, question 6(f), findings of postsingle-gender surveys revealed that 2.4% of the participants were not satisfied with the relationships they shared with their teachers. As depicted in Table 2, prior to single-gender classes 40.5% of students stated that they were not satisfied with the relationships they shared with their teachers. Comparisons made between responses from presurveys and postsurveys indicated a remarkable improvement of 37.6% of students who were satisfied with the relationships they shared with their teachers.

Student academic engagement (SAE). As shown in Table 4, item 6(c) of the student survey measured student academic engagement (SAE) in classes. Following their experience in single-gender classes, 7.1% were not satisfied with their level of academic

engagement. As described in Table 2, 31% of the participants reported that they were not satisfied with their level of academic engagement. When comparisons were made, findings revealed a 23.99% increase in student engagement.

Student comfort level (SCL). A crucial aspect of this study explored student level of comfort (SCL) in single-gender classes. As shown in Table 4, questions 6(h) and (j) generated important information so that a determination could be made. Postsingle-gender responses for question 6(h) indicated a total of 80.5% of the respondents being comfortable in single-gender classes. As indicated in Table 2, data gathered during presingle-gender surveys resulted in 51.3% of students being comfortable in the setting. That indicated a remarkable increase of 29.2% in the number of students claiming to be comfortable in the setting. The findings regarding student comfort level in single-gender classes were substantiated with the responses from question 6(j). Findings for 6(j) following a year of single-gender education gathered pertinent information regarding student overall satisfaction with single-gender classes. Data revealed that 16.7% of the respondents were not satisfied. When they initially responded to the same question during presingle-gender surveys, as shown in Table 2, 61.1% of the respondents were not at all satisfied with single-gender classes. When comparisons of preresponses and postresponses for both items were tabulated, findings clearly indicated a tremendous increase in student level of comfort and overall satisfaction in single-gender classes.

Cycle IV Findings

Cycle IV of the action research project was intended to explore the perception of parents and teachers following a year of the implementation of single-gender classes. In order to ensure triangulation it was important to gather pertinent information from two

groups of stakeholders who were essential members of the Hopeville School Community. They were in a position to recognize and identify any differences over the past year and offer crucial information on changes that their students had experienced. Both parents and teachers completed surveys regarding students' participation in single-gender education classes (Appendices E & F).

A group of parents were also selected and individually interviewed about students' experiences after a year of participating in single-gender classes. While no formal or structured interview protocol was used, they eagerly voiced their opinions and commented on how pleased they were with the changes in their middle school students. They also candidly expressed their delight and appreciation for the changes they had noticed in the attitudes and practices of the middle school teachers. Their discussions were informative and insightful.

Teacher survey.

Student academic performance (SAP). During the month of June, 2010, following a year of single-gender classes, a total of 14 middle school teachers completed a Teacher Survey (Appendix E) to document the degree to which single-gender classes affected students. The survey completed by teachers yielded information regarding student academic performance (SAP) on teacher created tests and quizzes as well as on district assessments. In order to evaluate student academic performance, teacher responses from questions 2(b) and 2(c) were analyzed and the results investigated to determine the influence that participating in single-gender classes had on student academic performance. As indicated in Table 5, responses to the question regarding student performance on teacher made tests and quizzes indicates that 65% of the teachers

agreed that single-gender classes improved students' performance. The results of the

teacher surveys are presented in Table 5.

Table 5

Student Academic Performance

Teacher Response	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral or No Opinion	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
2 b. Single-gender education has positively influenced student performance on teacher made tests and quizzes	29%	36%	0	14%	21%
2 c. Single-gender education has positively influenced student performance on district assessments	14%	21%	0	36%	29%

Table 5 provides additional information regarding student academic performance

on district assessments. Responses to question 2(c), as described in Table 5, clearly

indicate that 35% of the teachers agreed that single-gender classes has positively

influenced student performance on district assessments.

Student academic engagement (SAE). In order to gain the teachers' perception of

the impact on single-gender classes on student academic engagement (SAE), the findings

from questions 2(a) and 2(d) were analyzed and formatted in Table 6. When asked about

student level of engagement in item 2(a), 64% of the respondents agreed that single-

gender has positively impacted student level of engagement. The results of question 2(d)

regarding student participation in class mirrored the findings of question 2(a). When

asked about student participation in the classroom following the implementation of

single-gender classes, 100% of the respondents agreed that participation in single-gender

classes has increased student participation. Judging from previous conversations with teachers, findings in Table 6 clearly shows that single-gender classes have tremendously increased the level of student engagement.

Table 6

Level of Engagement, Self-Efficacy, Behavior, Engagement, Relationships with Peers and Teachers

Question 2: Items	Very Much	Much	Some	None
2 a. student level of engagement	50%	14%	36%	0
2 b. student self-efficacy	44%	21%	21%	14%
2 c. student behavior	36%	29%	29%	0
2 d. student participation in class	57%	43%	0	0
2 e. students' relationships with peers	36%	21%	43%	0
2 f. students' relationships with teachers	57%	29%	14%	0

Self-efficacy (SE). Question 2(b) provides pertinent data regarding the self-efficacy (SE) of middle school students at the site. As shown in Table 6, when asked about the degree that single-gender classes had on the self-efficacy of the students, 44% of respondents chose "very much." A total of 21% of the respondents selected "much," 21% agreed that it has had some positive impact on the self-efficacy of middle school students, and 14% believed that there was no impact.

Student behavior(SB). Question 2(c) gathered information regarding the degree to which single-gender classes positively impacted student behavior. As represented in

Table 6, 36% of the respondents chose "very much," 29 % chose much, and the

remaining 29% of teachers agreed that single-gender classes has positively impacted

student behavior.

Student relationships with peers (SRWP). As depicted in Table 6, findings of

question 2(c) of the survey show 36% of the respondents selected "very much" in

response to the impact of single-gender on student relationships with peers. A total of

21% of the respondents chose "much," and the remaining 43% of the respondents agreed

that single-gender education has had some positive effect on the relationship between

middle school students.

Student relationships with teacher (SRWT). The ways in which students behave

in the classroom are greatly influenced by the relationship with their teachers. Teachers

and students who demonstrate good communication skills, mutual respect, and show

interest in teaching from the point of view of the teacher and learning from a student

perspective will establish positive relationships in the classroom. Question 2(f) examined

student relationships with teachers (SRWT). Findings in Table 6 show 86.7% of the

teachers who completed the survey agreed that student participation in single-gender

classes has positively affected student-teacher relationship.

While the Teacher Survey in Appendix E was utilized for the purpose of

establishing triangulation, the results mirror that of the Student Postsurvey (Appendix D).

Results clearly indicated that student participation in single-gender classes has positively

influenced their level of engagement, self-efficacy, relationships with peers and teachers,

and overall behavior. The area of concern was the minute improvement made regarding

student performance on teacher created and district assessments. A probable reason

which emerged during the interview and observation processes was that approximately 96% of the middle school students at Hopeville were academically two to three grade levels beneath their current grade. During the previous school year, many received letters of retention however those were appealed by parents who adamantly refused to have their children retained, particularly in a system that has a history of failure. As a result, many of the middle school students will suffer the same fate in high school and continue to fail to obtain a level of proficiency on district and state assessments.

Parent survey.

Measuring parents' perception of and involvement in schools provides valuable information to principals and their faculty. The need for parent school connection has never been more critical, particularly with the implementation of new programs and initiatives. The complexity of schools and classrooms continues to grow therefore it is imperative that meaningful partnerships are established between schools and the parents of students they serve (Berger, 2004).

In order to establish triangulation and validity of the study, during the month of June, surveys were randomly distributed to parents of middle school students. Approximately 24 of them responded and agreed to complete the survey. When responses from the Parent Survey (Appendix F) were compared to the Teacher Survey (Appendix E), the findings were quite similar. They revealed that teachers and parents arrived at the same consensus regarding the impact of single-gender classes on their middle school students.

Student academic performance (SAP). Table 7 represents the findings from the parent survey. Item 1(a), regarding student academic performance on teacher made tests

and quizzes demonstrated parent's knowledge of middle school students' continued

dismal performance on assessments. Only 38% of the parents agreed that participating in

single-gender classes had positively impacted student performance on teacher made tests

and quizzes. Item 2(a) in Table 8, regarding student academic achievement answered the

same question and mirrored the findings from question 1(a) found in Table 7. Parents

agreed that there was minimal progress made in the area of student academic

performance. The general consensus was the majority of parents were still unsure of the

academic performance of students, hence the reason for 41% of them choosing Neutral or

No Opinion.

Table 7

Student Academic Performance

Items	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral or No Opinion	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
1.a Single-gender education improved student performance on teacher made tests and quizzes	21%	17%	41%	21%	0

Student behavior (SB). Parents also provided valuable data on changes in student

behavior (SB) following their participation in single-gender classes. Findings from item

2(b) in Table 8 revealed that 62% of the respondents agreed that the behavior of their

middle school student had been positively impacted by their participation in single-

gender classes.

Student relationships with peers (SRWP). Parent responses to questions

regarding student relationships with peers can be found on Table 8. Question 2(c)

indicated 66% of the parents who participated in the survey believed that single-gender education had positively impacted the relationships between middle school students and their peers.

Student relationships with teachers (SRWT). Pertinent information was gathered regarding parent perception of the student-teacher relationships. Findings from item 2(e) on Table 8 revealed that 51% of the respondents reported that their participation in single-gender classes has positively influenced relationships between students and teachers.

Table 8

Student Progress, Behavior, Relationship with Peers and Teachers

Items	Very Much	Much	Some	None
2 a. student academic progress	21%	17%	41%	21%
2 b. student behavior	37%	25%	21%	17%
2 c. student attitude toward peers	33%	33%	25%	9%
2 d. student attitude toward school	25%	21%	46%	8%
2 e. student attitude toward teachers	21%	33%	42%	4%

Parent interview findings.

Student level of comfort (SCL). During the month of August 2010, at the end of the school year, several parents were contacted and many agreed to be interviewed to discuss their child's participation in single-gender classes. According to Hersey and Blanchard (1995), engaging parents to acquire gradually, according to their readiness levels and ability, the skills they need to participate in their children's schools helps them

to rise to a higher level of motivation to be involved. During rich individual discussion

with parents on the impact of single-gender classes on their middle school students, seven

major themes of concern were revealed. The first was student level of comfort, academic

engagement, self-efficacy, relationship with teachers and peers, student behavior, and

finally student academic achievement. Parents also expressed their views of the teachers

at Hopeville.

One parent shared the experiences of her daughter:

> Before single-gender classes my daughter did not want to be at Hopeville. She
> was shy in front of the boys and was scared that they would tease her if her
> answer was incorrect. Since the all girl group my daughter feels more
> comfortable. She does not have to worry about those silly boys any more. She
> said that being in the Spelman group is like being with a group of sisters. I am so
> happy for my child!

The father of an eighth grade boy expressed his belief in the initiative:

> I was going to transfer my son out of Hopeville but because of single-gender
> classes, I kept him here. He was too much into the girls and was wasting his time
> trying to be a class clown to impress them. He needed a change. I liked the
> separation.

Self-efficacy(SE). Parents also revealed that their children's self-efficacy was

positively impacted as a result of their participation in single-gender classes. The

general consensus of the parents was that their middle-school students felt that they were

capable of achieving their goals and dreams. During advisories they engaged in goal

setting activities with their teachers, guidance counselor, and the principal. Parents

reported that their youngsters seemed to be empowered and rejuvenated.

One parent explained:

> Something good happened to my daughter because of the experience she had in
> single-gender classes. Everyday my daughter reminds me that she will become a
> pediatrician so that she can take care of sick babies. She talks about college

145

constantly and went to the library on Saturday to borrow some books about colleges.

At a later interview another parent stated:

> My grandson tells me that he is a proud Morehouse man. He talks about going to Morehouse when he graduates from high school. Before single-gender classes he never talked about school or about going to college. He will be the first one in the family to attend college. I get excited just listening to him talk about his future.

Parent expectations of teachers (PET). Parents also discussed teacher action and responsibility as they relate to the social, emotional, and academic progress of their children. They believed that in order for their children to change, it was necessary for the teachers to lead by example and modify their teaching practices, attitudes, and behaviors. Effective discipline does not come from a quick mastery of strategies. It originates from the heart and psyche of teachers and their willingness to successfully communicate with students. It also comes from establishing high expectations and maintaining a genuine belief that students are capable of accomplishing their individual goals (Johnson, 2005).

As suggested by the vice principal, throughout the implementation of single-gender classes, teachers received rigorous job embedded professional development and participated in book studies and self-reflective activities. It was obvious that there was a paradigm shift regarding their instructional practices and communication with students. As a result, there was a considerable decrease in discipline issues and classroom disruptions. Charles (1989) explained how teachers can impact the attitudes and behaviors of their students. "The main ways to help build positive student attitudes through communication are: (1) provide regular positive personal attention, (2) show continual willingness to help, and (3) focus on progress and the overcoming of obstacles" (p. 162).

One parent stated:

> It's about time that these teachers did their job. I heard that they received training to learn how to change their bad attitudes. Even my son noticed that the teachers were more patient and caring. For the school year he was only suspended once. I am glad that those teachers finally see that they were the biggest part of the problem.

Another parent discussed the changes in teacher actions:

> I visited the school back in February and the teachers were standing at the door greeting the students as they entered the classroom. I could not believe my eyes! That can make a difference to a child who is having a bad day. When they have good days and are feeling good about themselves they will have better behavior and learn more. My son had a good year at Hopeville. I am so proud of him.

The parent of a 6th grade student mentioned:

> Everyday when she came home from school, my daughter told me how the teachers were working harder and were much nicer to the students. I only hope that they will continue with this next year and not go back to their bad habits.

The concerned guardian of a sixth grade student remarked:

> My daughter had an excellent year. Last week I ran into the vice principal who told me that the middle school students did not do well and the NJASK scores are very low but I know that my daughter tried her best and the teachers worked very hard. The high test scores will come later.

The intensity of the interviews highlighted the many improvements since the implementation of single-gender classes. The general consensus of the interviewees was that despite the fact that the academic performance of the middle school students remained somewhat dismal, participation in single-gender classes was steering students and teachers in a positive direction. The palpable improvement in their behavior, self-efficacy, level of engagement, teacher practices, relationships with others, and comfort level in school were extremely promising to the parents who were interviewed. They were optimistic that eventually, in the event that Hopeville was able to sustain single-gender classes, subsequently students will inherently make great academic gains.

Summary of Findings

Research question 1: *How did participation in single-gender classes impact the academic engagement and performance of middle school students in an urban setting?*

Student engagement also refers to students' willingness, aspiration, and obligation to successfully participate in the learning process. Student engagement is increasingly seen as an indicator of successful classroom instruction and is increasingly regarded as a result of best practices and school improvement activities. Students are engaged when they are attracted to and mesmerized by their work at school. Despite challenges and obstacles, students at Hopeville persisted and took discernible delight and pride in accomplishing their work.

Relationships between students and adults in schools, and among students themselves, are decisive factors of student engagement. This is especially factual among students considered to be at-risk and those lacking positive adult interaction in their home experiences. There are a plethora of strategies for establishing and enhancing relationships, including recognizing the ideas, feelings, opinions and voices of students. These practices served to preserve equity and mutual respect between students and other stakeholders at Hopeville. It also sustained thriving partnerships throughout the learning environment. Cooperative learning groups, as well as peer tutoring classroom centers were implemented to encourage students to work cohesively to complete assignments and projects. Consequently, relationships were developed and verbal interactions with peers were enhanced. The end result was also an increased level of comfort for students. During ongoing faculty meetings throughout the school year, 98% of the middle school staff expressed interest in returning to single-gender classes for the 2010-2011 schoolyear. They sighted one of the notable changes with the separation of both boys and girls as an increased

148

participation in classroom discussions. Many teachers discussed the boost in the self-efficacy and confidence of both male and female students. The one-on-one relationship between student and teacher was the critical element that led to increased student motivation and higher levels of engagement in academics and school life.

Without question, there were positive outcomes for the students who participated in single-gender classes. Data revealed all aspects of student behavior, level of comfort, self-efficacy, level of engagement, performance on teacher created and district assessments and relationships with peers and teachers were positively influenced by their experiences in single-gender classes. The area of concern remained student performance on standardized assessments. Despite the fact that approximately 90% of the middle school students failed to obtain a level of proficiency, when disaggregated, data clearly confirmed that in the area of mathematics, 79% of the students improved their scores. In language arts literacy, approximately 26% of the participants increased individual scores.

Further probing revealed that for the past 15 years the academic performance at Hopeville had been dismal and the school's inability to attract or retain highly qualified teachers had negatively affected student performance. Longitudinal studies of student performance show that the school has a history of practicing social promotion whereby, despite the fact that they were inadequately prepared, students were promoted to the next grade very often at the persistence of parents who were embarrassed to have their youngsters retained. As the years progressed, the severity of the situation escalated and many students fell further behind. Consequently, students were never able to catch up. Additional probing indicated that at least 40% of the middle school students at the site were approximately three grade levels beneath their current grade. This was one of the

major reasons for the continuous dismal academic scores of middle school students at Hopeville.

Information regarding student academic achievement on standardized assessments following 1 year of participating in single-gender classes is presented in Appendix I. In order to preserve anonymity and confidentiality initials were randomly assigned to each participant. Out of the 42 middle school participants, 33% obtained a level of proficiency in mathematics. None of the participants obtained a level of advanced proficient. Appendix I provided a review of the NJASK math scores from the previous year prior to participating in single-gender classes. Findings revealed 14% of the participants obtained a level of proficiency. That indicated a 19% increase when compared to the scores retrieved from presingle gender classes. Results also indicated that following a year in single-gender classes, the individual mathematics scores of 4 participants depreciated from a range of 1-50 points. Despite the fact that 24 of the 42 participants failed to obtain a level of proficiency on the NJASK, they were able to increase their individual math scores from a range of 1 point to 44 points.

When the comparison was made in the area of language arts literacy, findings indicated that following a year of single-gender classes, individual scores for 71% of the students decreased by a range of 1 to 40 points. One student was able to obtain a level of advanced proficiency. A total of 28% of the participants increased their individual scores from a range of 1 to 78 points.

While it was clearly an instructional issue in literacy, when disaggregated, math scores indicated that considerable progress was made. Despite the fact that students were unable to obtain a level of proficiency on the NJASK, further analysis of the data

indicated that 79% of the participants were able to increase their individual performance in math following a year of experience in single-gender classes. A growth model was developed and longitudinal studies conducted to track student academic performance.

Question 2: *How did participation in single-gender classes influence the behavior of middle school students in an urban setting?*

Data clearly demonstrated that single-gender classes have positively influenced student behavior. The behavior referrals in single-gender classrooms decreased, most notably in the male classrooms. It was therefore important that staff at Hopeville develop priorities or goals outlining the importance of healthy social, behavioral, emotional, ethical, and intellectual development. In fact, they may be encouraged to spell out these priorities within a school improvement plan in order to ensure that organizational structures are developed and resources are allocated for planning and implementing comprehensive behavior supports.

Concurrently, with the implementation of single-gender classes, teachers and support staff at Hopeville received job embedded staff development and acquired strategies to effectively handle the discipline issues of their students. A high incidence of classroom disciplinary problems had a significant impact on the effectiveness of teaching and learning. In this respect, it was discovered that teachers facing such issues failed to plan and design appropriate instructional tasks. One of the major feats of the initiative concentrated on classroom management. It also focused on encouraging and establishing student self-control through a process of promoting positive student achievement and behavior. Thus academic achievement, teacher efficacy, and teacher and student behavior were directly linked with the concept of school and classroom management. This can be

attributed to the improved student behavior at Hopeville. When the comparison was made

between the Discipline Atom of June, 2009, Table 11 in Appendix J, prior to the

implementation of single-gender classes and the Discipline Atom for June 2010, as

illustrated in Table 12, in Appendix K, following a year of participating in single-gender

classes, the Discipline Atom for the month of June 2010 revealed that 3.57 % of middle

school students received suspensions. That disclosed a reduction of student suspensions

by 7.65% from June of the previous year.

Question 3: *How did participating in single-gender classes influence the self-efficacy of middle school students in an urban setting?*

Self-efficacy is commonly defined as the belief in one's ability to achieve a goal

or a desired outcome. Students with a strong sense of efficacy are more likely to

challenge themselves with difficult tasks and be intrinsically motivated. These students

will put forth a high degree of effort in order to overcome obstacles and surpass

expectations. They attribute failure to things that are in their control, rather than blame

external factors. Self-efficacious students also recover quickly from impediments and

eventually are likely to achieve their individual goals. Students with low self-efficacy, on

the other hand, believe they cannot be successful and thus are less likely to make a

concerted or extended effort and may consider challenging tasks as menaces that are to be

avoided. Thus, students with poor self-efficacy have low aspirations which may result in

disappointing academic performances becoming part of a self-fulfilling feedback cycle.

Despite their low socioeconomic status, academic disconnect, and minimal

parental persuasion, middle-school students at Hopeville possessed extraordinary levels

of self-efficacy. Individual interviews revealed a potent force of fortitude and

determination to accomplish their goals and aspirations. The naming of the single-gender groups after colleges and universities was motivating for the students who made the connection between college attendance and the acquisition of a lifetime income level, quality of life, better health, and decreased dependability on governmental financial support systems.

Question 4: *How did teachers align their teaching practices and pedagogy to accommodate single-gender classes?*

Teachers learned new skills and habits that helped them to develop, polish, and enhance their already natural inclination to motivate and engage students. Teachers learned systematic strategies that facilitated student engagement. As a result, students at Hopeville developed behavioral skills and habits that led to increased academic performance and greater involvement with school life. During the implementation of single-gender classes, teachers at Hopeville engaged in continuous job embedded professional development on strategies to attain and sustain the focus and engagement of students. With the adaptation of a project-based curriculum, students were engaged in more hands-on and inquiry-based activities. Classrooms were student centered and students received opportunities to take ownership of their learning. During the implementation of single-gender classes, the student level of engagement was positively influenced as a result of the genuine efforts and strategies employed by middle school teachers to provide students with higher levels of questioning and thinking skills.

Classroom management was also an area of focus for teachers. Their participation in book studies and discussions helped them to acquire valuable skills to appropriately and effectively address classroom disruptions and student inappropriate behaviors. The

data presented in Appendix K, the Discipline Atom for the month of June, 2010, reveal a 75% reduction in student suspensions.

It was quite obvious the middle school teachers at Hopeville ultimately saw themselves as reflective practitioners and perpetual learners. Time during faculty and grade level articulation focused on meaningful discussions regarding the improvement of practices. A Data Team was created to disaggregate data so that informed decisions were made regarding all aspects of student performance. A Critical Friends group was established so that teachers could share ideas, strategies, and practices. They also used meetings to discuss challenges and obstacles they encountered. Short-term wins were celebrated and collaborative efforts made to sustain best practices. The determination of the teachers to work fastidiously to align their actions and attitudes with the mission of the organization resulted in improved students' academic performance and meaningful social emotional experiences. The fifth and final research question will be answered in the following chapter.

Recommendations for Future Research

The themes and patterns that emerged during this action research entailed the necessity for further expansion of the research on the impact of single-gender classes on urban middle school students particularly in the area of student academic achievement. In this research study, results may have been attributed to a host of interrelated factors. The content, teacher-efficacy, pedagogy, parental support, and the overall organization of a school setting matter, as do the climate, culture, and level of expectation.

Teachers reported that it would take more than 1 year to observe all the advantages and disadvantages of single-gender classes. Recommendations were also

made to make comparisons between single-gender and coed classes at Hopeville. An area

that is largely unexplored is the implementation of specific instructional models. One

recommendation involves the possible scrutiny of student achievement based on the

implementation of a comprehensive curriculum that facilitates specific strategies and

methods that address the differences of each gender. The study also encourages further

inquiry into the notion that single-gender classes present the greatest probability for

improving the academic achievement of middle school students in an urban setting.

Questions for further research may include:

1. How does teacher self-efficacy impact the academic achievement of middle-
    school students in an urban setting?

2. What are the contextual, instructional, and pedagogical activities and practices
    unique to single-gender schools and classes?

3. In what specific ways does single-gender education impact each gender?

4. Is single-gender education an effective way of closing the gender
    achievement gap?

Implications

These implications derived from the findings of the study:

1. Relationships with teachers profoundly impact all aspects of student
    experiences in school.

2. Teacher quality is critical in all aspects of student social emotional
    development as well as academic development.

3. It is imperative that students become reflective practitioners who participate
    in goal setting activities.

4. The separating of boys and girls positively influences the level of comfort for many students.

5. Hands-on and inquiry based activities positively impact student engagement.

6. While it has a positive impact, separating the genders does not exclusively guarantee student academic achievement.

7. The establishing of high standards and expectations for students propels them to attain their goals and aspirations and positively impact student self-efficacy.

8. The creation of a sense of community establishes trust, faith, and reliance for students.

Subjectivity and Limitations

*The researcher's role as the gatekeeper and chief disciplinarian of the site

*Private information may be observed that the researcher cannot report

*Challenges with disassociation

*Researcher may be seen as intrusive

* Single-gender classes at this site have been implemented for less than 1 year

Conclusion

If urban middle school students at Hopeville are to successfully maneuver through the increasing challenges and academic rigors of middle school, their level of engagement, self-efficacy, behavior, relationship with other stakeholders, and level of comfort must be efficiently supported throughout the transition. A sense of responsibility was fostered among students for appropriate behavior, cutting down on time spent on discipline issues and enhancing instructional time. It is also imperative that a sense of responsibility is fostered among students and visible and attainable goals are established.

Data were disaggregated so that an accurate picture could be painted of the condition of student academic performance. The use of data helped stakeholders at Hopeville to identify, acknowledge, and celebrate strengths while focusing attention and resources on areas of need. A sense of urgency was created and instruction and all actions were aligned to the standards and benchmarks established by the school, district, and State Department of Education. Opportunities for capacity building were provided to teachers so that they could keep abreast of best educational practices. Instructional guides provided instructional coaching and support for teachers. One of the most important supports was time for school employees to align instruction to standards and assessments. Administrators provided continuous feedback to teachers and support staff to ensure that they were equipped with the necessary resources and materials needed to execute their duties. Confidence and respect of parents were pursued by educators, primarily by improving the behavior, level of academic engagement and performance, self-efficacy, level of comfort, and student relationships with others,

When elements of a good education are present, girls and boys succeed. Elements include small classes, a mutual respect between student and teachers, parental involvement, support services and resources, equitable teaching practices, and an inquiry based academic curriculum that facilitates the creativity and engagement of all students. Barbour, Barbour and Scully (2008) agreed "Schools are still the catalysts in most new educational endeavors. No other social institution in the United States has the oversight or the trained personnel to serve in this capacity" (p. 348).

Chapter 5: Leadership Platform

Introduction

Leadership by definition is the ability to provide direction or guidance. A leader is someone who directs, and one who possesses authority or influence. Wren (1995) described leadership as one of the world's oldest preoccupations. Giulani (2002) stated that leadership does not simply happen, it can be taught, learned, and developed. For many, the meaning of leadership depends on the type of organization. It has been conceived as a matter of inducing compliance, the exercise of influence, a form of persuasion, and as a tool to obtain the goals of the organization. It can also be viewed as an initiation of structure, order, and change.

Leadership is a complex process that ultimately focuses on fostering change. The desired change is not random, but through the leader, is directed towards a future outcome or condition, which is valued, agreed upon, and desired by all stakeholders. Leadership also involves having the capability, whether innate or learned, to inspire followers to achieve the goals of the organization. Wren (1995) contended,

> Leadership has been conceived as the focus of group process, as a matter of personality, as a matter of inducing compliance, as the exercise of influence, as particular behaviors, as a form of persuasion, as a power relation, as an instrument to achieve goals, as an effect of interaction, as a differentiated role, as initiation of structure and as many combinations of these definitions. (p. 31)

Real leaders inject high levels of motivation, energy, enthusiasm, passion, and inspiration into the veins of those around them. Effective leadership calls for leaders to demonstrate flexibility, honesty, compassion, and to conduct ourselves with uncompromising integrity. It is common knowledge that leaders are held to higher standards than that of their followers. We are expected to provide solutions in times of

crisis and continuously grapple with ethical dilemmas. Leaders are often forced to make spontaneous decisions and respond to the needs of the organization at phenomenal paces. Fullan (2001) stated that leaders are not super humans or saviors whose behaviors cannot be emulated, but individuals who are capable of challenging followers to face problems and issues in the organization and work cohesively to solve them.

Seifert and Vornberg (2002) added, "A model for creating a vision for a school does not need to be complex, but it does need to be thorough and to include all stakeholder groups" (p. 100). Leadership affords the leader opportunities to collaborate with stakeholders to create a vision and to set appropriate goals that are attainable. These goals are aligned with the vision of the organization and the desired end result. It is imperative that the leader maintains the ability to keep the vision alive in the minds and hearts of followers, and articulate the fact that change is inevitable. In addition to being capable of injecting high levels of energy and commitment into the veins of followers, we lead by example, display good work ethics, and conduct ourselves with uncompromising integrity.

An effective leader, regardless of his or her leadership platform, incorporates the domains of emotional intelligence and takes the time to determine the needs of followers as they are dependent on the situation and its effect on the organization. Since the leader's effectiveness will also rely heavily on their relationship with followers, it is crucial that the effort is made to develop meaningful and professional working relationships with stakeholders. In addition to building capacity among followers, it is important that I set the example by personally engaging myself in learning activities and become a perpetual learner. This way, along with taking risks, encouraging creativity,

and thinking outside the box, I am able to grow professionally, personally, and stay abreast of educational trends and best practices.

Transformational Leadership

Transformational leaders demonstrate levels of flexibility and are able to establish and maintain healthy and professional relationships with our followers. We gain the respect, trust, faith, and confidence of those who we lead and make sound decisions which will benefit the organization and those within it. Transformational leadership also involves the practice of tapping the shared values of stakeholders and expanding their normative commitment to the organization. Couto (1993) supported this finding. "In addition leaders may increase the confidence of followers; elevate followers' expectations of success and elevate the value of the leader's intended for the follower" (p. 104).

As a transformational leader, I recognize the importance of establishing a healthy culture in the organization. This is evident by my demonstration of flexibility and a genuine concern, compassion, and empathy for all stakeholders in the organization. I value the findings of Abraham Maslow who developed one of the most influential theories regarding the needs of individuals. The five basic categories of human needs begin at physiological needs and end with self-actualization, which refers to the need to develop one's fullest or to actualize one's potential. In my genuine attempt to lead followers to the peak of Maslow's pyramid, I assist and guide them to the process of fulfilling the needs and prerequisites, which are physiological, safety, belongingness/love and esteem, or the need to feel valued. Hughes, Ginnett, and Curphy (1995) concurred,

"According to Maslow, lower level needs must be satisfied before the next higher level would become salient in motivating behavior" (p. 329).

When followers reach to the level of self-actualization, they become more beneficial to the organization. Bolman and Deal (2003) supported this by stating the fact that when stakeholders find satisfaction and meaning in their work, the organization benefits from effective use of individual talent and energy. An individual who has attained Maslow's highest level of self-actualization is comparable to Collins's (2001) Level 5 executive, whose incredible ambition and level of motivation is first and foremost for the organization.

Burns (2003) provided a noble description of transformational leadership. "The transforming leader shapes, alters, and elevates the motives, values, and goals of followers. The transforming leader strategically plans to achieve significant change. There is a special power entailed in transforming leadership" (p. 103). The No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) has special meaning to school and district leaders, providing increased flexibility in how resources are distributed in return for setting standards for student achievement and holding educators accountable for results. In addition to accountability, flexible spending, and parental choice, using effective practices and programs is one of the most critical elements of NCLB. According to Cotton (2003),

> The law emphasizes the use of educational programs and practices that have been demonstrated effective. Schools are expected not only to use effective programs and practices, but also to know the research supporting such practices and to justify the changes they make. (p. 145)

As a result of the dismal scores on standardized assessments, an increase in discipline infractions, and a major academic disengagement experienced by middle

school students, it was imperative that as the leader of the organization, I collaborated with stakeholders to effectively disaggregated data in order to paint an accurate picture of Hopeville, establish a sense of urgency, and implement research based best practices to address the needs of the school. Bernhardt (2002) made a poignant suggestion,

> To use data effectively in a school requires getting people involved in looking at and using student achievement data. When staff sees the comprehensive view of the results they are getting now, they will easily engage in ongoing dialogue of what needs to change to get different results. (p. 61)

As the sense of urgency was established regarding the depressing performance of middle school students, in order to amend the climate of the organization and motivate staff, opportunities were provided for them to participate in the decision-making process. The traditional transactional leadership approach to which they had become accustomed called for followers to be completely dependent on their leader with little control over what they do or their level of participation. In this model, information continuously trickled from the top down. Followers did as they were told and suffered the consequences if they dared to question the decisions of the leader. This approach prevented followers from making any connection, or taking responsibility for the success or failures of the organization. It also impeded creativity and prohibited risk taking. Silins (1992) discussed the two approaches: "Transactional leadership relies on an exchange relationship between leader and followers, while transformational leadership sets aside the self-centered interests of the followers to bring about enhanced performance and change" (p. 328).

As a people oriented leader, I recognize the importance of empowering followers, establishing professional learning communities, and encouraging autonomy and collegiality. Consequently, after much discussion and brainstorming, a coalition was

created to implement experimental single-gender education classes for middle school

students at Hopeville. Bellamy, Fulmer, Murphy, and Muth (2007) concurred,

> Norms that foster collaborative relationships provide a foundation for a school's
> social capital. Principals build on that foundation through the daily work of
> listening and talking. While conversational leadership in the school is
> multidirectional and widely shared among members of the school community, the
> principal's role is central. Being present and actively participating in the normal
> day-to-day problem solving in a school create opportunities for frequent,
> spontaneous, and relevant conversations. (p. 114)

Transformational leaders encourage collegiality and provide opportunities for

teachers to work collaboratively in teams or cohorts. They schedule accommodated time

for vertical and horizontal articulation as well professional learning committees. The

ultimate goal included the development and fostering of self managing teams that worked

interdependently. Since the concept of "working like the geese" was new to the

organization, it took time and effort to get rid of counterproductive habits and attitudes

that have languished within the organization. It was also vital to expand the knowledge of

the staff by providing opportunities for staff development and capacity building.

Downey, English, Frase, Poston and Steffy (2004) postulated,

> We are about providing the basis for professional adults to work together
> beneficially and successfully. Our goal is to learn together. It's not about teachers
> answering to the authority of the principal. Rather, it is about creating a
> community of learners. (p. 80)

Senge (2006) provided a compelling account on the effectiveness and the art of

collective learning in the organization. The author's vision of a highly effective learning

organization is a team of stakeholders who are continuously engaged in capacity

building. Like me, they view themselves as lifelong learners who work systematically to

create the desired results. It is common knowledge that I regard the building of capacity

as a crucial component of my role as an instructional leader.

163

During faculty meetings as well as conferences with the coalition, intended goals were developed as they pertained to the implementation of single-gender experimental classes. Everyone received opportunities to participate and each opinion was respected and taken into consideration. Parents were also invited to community meetings and information sessions so as to advocate for their children and voice their concerns and opinions regarding single-gender education. A collaborative leadership platform called for me to value the advantages of shared decision making and celebrating the positive outcomes when genuine collaborative school culture is established. It provided a feeling of solidarity, which supported both teacher morale and student achievement. Scheurich (1998) made a salient point; "Virtually all the staff have bonded together in a deep way so that they feel they are doing the work of schooling together as a family" (p. 24).

The teachers of the middle school students took ownership of the initiative and were appreciative for the opportunity to partake in the decision-making process. They discussed the possibility of cross content curriculum instruction and rejoiced at the possibility of collaborating with activity teachers. Interdisciplinary/cross-curricular teaching involves a conscious effort to apply knowledge, principles, and/or values to more than one academic discipline simultaneously. The disciplines may be related through a central theme, issue, problem, process, topic, or experience. The activity teachers expressed a sense of triumph and purpose as they were finally able to see themselves as essential components of the instructional course. Peterson, Gok, and Warren (1995) concurred,

> In short, for decentralized, shared decision making to be successful school leadership needs first, to be able to articulate a shared educational vision for the school so the new governance structures can have some clarity of purpose and direction. Second, schools with SBDM (site-based decision making) need to have

164

leaders with knowledge and skills in governance and decision making. Third, they need the ability to develop effective working teams (p.1)

Resonant Leadership

My adaptation of the resonant leadership model has led me to demonstrate continuous attunement to the feelings and emotions of my followers and work diligently to move them toward positive emotional directions. In addition to incorporating high levels of enthusiasm and trust, I maintained an organizational environment which was conducive to collegiality, camaraderie, uniformity, and team building. There were reservations regarding the fact this type of environment positively influenced staff productivity, which was one of the ultimate goals of any organization. The resonant leadership style called for me to be attuned with the domains of emotional intelligence and to demonstrate personal competencies and capabilities in the areas of self-awareness, self-management, social competence, and social awareness. Goleman (2002) supported this view. "There are many paths to excellence, and superb leaders can possess very different personal styles; still we find that effective leaders typically demonstrate strengths in at least one competence from each of the four fundamental areas of emotional intelligence" (p. 187).

On a team, resonance releases energy in people, and it increases the amount of energy available to the team, which, in turn, puts people in a state where they can work at their best. On a resonant team, the members vibrate together with a positive emotional energy. When a coalition as a whole demonstrates emotional intelligence that predicts that it will be a top-performing team, no matter what its performance criterion might be. Once the excitement and buy in were secured and sustained, it was less challenging to begin implementation of the single-gender experimental classes. The enthusiasm of the

165

stakeholders provided momentum, hence, that momentum was directed toward our collective values. The basic idea is that some groups and organizations accomplish more because of the way that people are connected to and how they work with each other. The advantage is their social capital and the trust that they share. Bellamy et al. (2007) wrote,

- Groups of teachers pitch in, doing far more than their share to make an event work, trusting that others will reciprocate when they themselves need extra help.

- Teachers know their students' parents and family members by name and each group is comfortable telephoning the other.

- Families and teachers share information easily and quickly about whether homework assignments are too difficult, time-consuming, or unclear.

- Teachers share information and ideas-about how to teach particular topics or handle particular students-respectfully, honestly, and with confidence that others will respond likewise to requests for help or offers of assistance.

(p. 50)

The initiative to implement experimental single-gender classes involved an open change process, the involvement of all stakeholders, the modeling of desired behaviors, and transparent goals and desired outcomes. Seifert and Vornberg (2002) advised, "It is important to sustain an environment where teachers and principals feel free to experiment instructionally in the classroom. Encouraging teachers to try new instructional models and strategies is most important" (p. 169).

In addition to the continuous criticism of Hopeville regarding dismal student performance, former leadership, and instructional practices, we were all deeply

166

concerned with the state of the organization. The school's constant failure and the fact that it was categorized as one in dire need of transformation had opened the doors for central office to impose control and constrict our freedom. We were determined to create a bond and work cohesively in order to reshape the system. Wheatley (1999) supported this effort; "Self-organizing systems offer compelling lessons in how the world works, of how order is sustained in the midst of change" (p. 90).

Servant Leadership

Greenleaf (1977) defined servant leadership as effective leadership that derives from the urge or desire to help others. This viewpoint stands in contrast to those leadership theories that focus on control of the people within the organization. As a servant leader, I had the need to first serve and then lead as a way of expanding service to individuals and the organization. Servant leadership is a long-term transformational approach to life and work and has the potential for creating positive change throughout the organization. This model, like many of the other leadership styles, shows concern for followers, emphasizes collaboration, and is cognizant of the effort to encourage followers to be actively involved in the support of organizational goals and visions.

Characteristics of the servant leadership style include listening intently to others, empathizing and accepting individuals for their uniqueness, the ability to heal one's self and others, possessing general and self-awareness, having the ability to persuade followers, looking at the big picture, building the organization, expanding capacity, having the ability to learn from past lessons and finally displaying stewardship which calls for us to do what ever is necessary to benefit the organization. In the following statement Greenleaf (1995) added, "One does not awaken each morning with the

167

compulsion to reinvent the wheel. But if one is servant, either leader or follower, one is always searching, listening, expecting that a better wheel for these times is in the making" (p. 20).

The servant leader has many basic ingredients of real leadership. These include integrity, determination, magnanimity, humility, openness, and creativity. Integrity is the standard of moral and intellectual honesty and leaders conduct themselves based on this expectation of honesty. As a dedicated servant leader, it is imperative that I continue to be committed to making my level of involvement my passion (Bennis, 1990).

During the phases of the single-gender initiative, the characteristics of servant leadership that I had adopted were prevalent and quite ubiquitous. Throughout the planning and implementation processes, instead of occupying a position at the top of the chain of command, I took the perspective to position myself at the center of the organization and remained working cohesively with parents, staff, central office, students, and members of the coalition. The lines of communication were continuous and unrestricted as to avoid any ambiguity or misconception. The central dynamic of my role as a servant leader called for me to cultivate those within the organization. Marzano et al. (2005) explained the critical skills of servant leadership:

- o Understanding the personnel needs of those within the organization
- o Healing wounds caused by conflict within the organization
- o Being a steward of the resources of the organization
- o Developing the skills of those within the organization
- o Being an effective listener (p. 17).

168

Instructional Leadership

Leithwood, Jantzi, and Steinbach (1999) noted that instructional leadership is one of the most frequently mentioned educational leadership concepts in North America. Smith and Andrews (1989) identify four dimensions or roles of an instructional leader: resource provider, instructional resource, communicator, and a visible presence. As the resource provider, I made certain that the teachers were equipped with the materials and resources necessary to perform their duties. These included curriculum guides, new classroom libraries with a plethora of and manipulatives for each gender, and time built in the schedule to accommodate vertical and horizontal articulation. As an instructional resource, I was actively supportive and involved with the day-to-day instructional activities and modeled the desired behaviors. In other words, I led by example and participated in in-service training and articulation meetings. Capacity building was the primary focus and teachers received job embedded professional development. Priority was given to instructional concerns and during faculty meetings we reviewed literature on single-gender classes. Prior to implementation, several visits were made to two schools that had successfully implemented single-gender classes. Finally, during the implementation phase of the initiative, my presence was highly visible via classroom walkthroughs and observations.

Subsequently, teachers received meaningful feedback regarding their performance and the alignment of their actions and practices with the goals of the organization. Hallinger, Murphy, Weil, Mesa, and Mitman (1983) identify three main functions of the instructional leader. The first is defining the mission of the school, the second is

managing curriculum and instruction, and the third involves promoting a positive school climate.

Our ultimate goal was to positively influence student achievement by improving their level of comfort in the classrooms, enhancing their self-efficacy, connecting with the school, strengthening academic engagement, establishing meaningful relationships with teachers and peers, and the attentiveness to their life goals and aspirations. It was crucial that the students were cognizant of the purpose and intended outcomes of the implementation of single-gender classes.

Visionary Leadership

Included in my leadership platform is the style of the visionary leader. The shared vision to implement experimental single-gender classes was discussed in such a manner that followers were apt to buy in, adopt it, and enthusiastically take ownership. Visionary leaders are able to articulate the vision, stay on course, and see that all stakeholders are attuned to the goals of the organization. The adoption of this style of leadership called for me to demonstrate the ability to bring about change that gets infused deeply into the pores of Hopeville's culture. It also involved the articulating and sharing of compelling beliefs and values regarding the purpose of the organization, the capability of the students to learn, the role of the teachers, and the importance of parental and community involvement. The implementation of our vision at Hopeville began with a complete assessment of the current state of the organization and the desired position. Seifert and Vornberg (2002) concurred. "The vision is the force that unites all stakeholders to proceed in a similar direction and provides a schema with which to evaluate new programs" (p. 98)

Situational Leadership

The effective leader is aware of the fact that no single leadership style is appropriate for all followers and all situations and accurately distinguishes which styles are appropriate for which stakeholders in which situations. According to Hersey and Blanchard (1995), effective situational leaders are capable of adapting their chosen style of leadership to successfully address each situation. With the adaptation of traits from several leadership models, I am now cognizant of the fact that effective leadership requires me to be flexible due to the fact that different situations require different leadership approaches and tactics. Hence, I can also describe myself as a situational leader. Situational leadership theory states that the readiness and capability of stakeholders may be altered as a result of particular situations, personal issues and crisis, and the assignment of new responsibilities. When this occurs, it is imperative that I able to appropriately adjust my behavior in order to maintain standards regarding performance of stakeholders. Marzano et al. (2005) described the characteristics of the situational leader: "The basic principle underlying situational leadership is that the leader adapts her leadership behavior to followers' 'maturity' based on their willingness and ability to perform a specific task" (p. 17)

Role of Followers

Many believe that followers have about as much influence on their leaders as leaders have on them. I believe that the role of followers is to embrace change in the organization and work diligently toward achieving its goals and vision. Followers who are truly committed to the transformation of the organization are collegial, motivated,

cooperative, and supportive of their leader as pertinent decisions are made in the best

interest of the organization and its stakeholders. Additionally, followers must have the

desire, pride, and willingness to take the initiative and take advantage of all opportunities

for growth and professional development. They must see the need to stay abreast of

current trends and best practices. Followers must also be knowledgeable of protocols and

diplomatic ways and methods of exercising their initiative and voicing concerns and

opinions regarding decisions made by the leader. Gardner (1995) concurred,

> In recent decades there has been increasing support for the view that the purposes
> of the group are best served by a relationship in which the leader helps followers
> to develop their own judgment and enables them to grow and to become better
> contributors. (p. 185)

Leadership Reflection

My work at Rowan University has been the vehicle which has familiarized me

with organizational and leadership gurus such as Robert Evans, John P. Kotter, Peter

Senge, Margaret Wheatley, Rudy Giuliani, Jim Collins, Michael Fullan, and several

others. As the leader of a large organization classified as in dire need of transformation, I

found the information that I gained throughout my coursework to be valuable, practical,

and relevant. The ideas, strategies, and suggestions can be easily transferable to any type

of organization. It is imperative that I demonstrate the ability to effectively lead change.

Fullan (2001) concedes that principals like me do not have to be superhuman leaders

whose behavior can never be emulated. Instead, successful leaders understand that

meaningful and sustained change depends on not the extraordinary, but on many who are

genuinely dedicated to achieving the intended outcome, and who are willing to learn from

the experts and readjust their current practices which may not have been as successful as

they had anticipated. It is mainly about working to improve my leadership by focusing on core aspects. Reeves (2006) added,

> Great leaders are not mythological composites of every dimension of leadership. Instead they have self-confidence, and without hubris they acknowledge their deficiencies and fill their subordinate ranks not with lackeys but with exceptional leaders who bring complementary strengths to the organization. (p. 33)

One of the most defining moments occurred when I read about the importance of relationships in the change process. Fullan (2001) listed the establishing of relationships as the third component in his framework for leadership model. He mentioned that when relationships improve, things improve also, however if they deteriorate, then so do the plans, efforts, and the organization in general. I am cognizant of the value of maintaining healthy working relationships with stakeholders in the organization. As I work diligently to do so, I demonstrate a genuine concern and regard for their lives inside as well as outside of the organization hence I am more empathic of the needs of my staff.

Prior to my enrollment in the doctoral program at Rowan, I made a solemn vow to never get involved in the personal lives, attitudes, or feelings of my staff. My single concern was that they got the job done by any means necessary. The doctoral program at Rowan has made me more mindful of the humanistic side of leadership, which is critical when introducing initiatives and implementing second order change. Prior to my acquisition of knowledge and intellectual stimulation I lacked the skills necessary to appropriately tap into that aspect of effective leadership.

Evans (1996) also examined the human resource perspective on organizational life. He viewed human nature as affected by countless variables that include their personal lives, which may often intrude on their productivity or lack there of; the aging of

staff; energy levels; conflicts over resources; burn out; illness; divorce; power-struggles; past negative experiences; or a lack of interest. Meaningful relationships are established built and sustained. I have become more cognizant of turbulences that intrude on the lives of stakeholders, which may consequently have a negative effect on change initiatives. I have also come to the realization that since I have changed my attitude and continue to embrace their needs as well as their talents. My efforts have positively influenced staff attendance, their willingness to embrace change, their sense of accountability and productivity.

In leading change initiatives, I have utilized the 8 Step Process outlined by Kotter (1996). It allowed me to avoid failure and guide stakeholders to become adept at change. By improving our ability to change, the team at Hopeville has increased our chances of success, both at present and in the future. Without this ability to adapt continuously, organizations cannot flourish. Each stage recognizes a key principle identified by Kotter relating to people's attitudes and approach to change, and in which people understand, embrace and then change.

Standard 1 of the Interstate Leaders' Licensure Consortium (ISLLC) calls for me to have the knowledge and capacity needed to promote the success of all students by facilitating the development, articulation, implementation, and stewardship of a school or district vision supported by the stakeholders and the school community at large (Council of Chief State School Officers [CCSSO], 1996). In order to be in compliance with the requirements that are clearly stipulated in this standard, it is crucial that I demonstrate the understanding that teamwork begins with great leadership. I find that many leaders often make the grave mistake of working in isolation, hence, stagnating and under developing

174

the talents and resources of stakeholders. As the instructional leader of my organization, I am astutely aware of the fact that my own successes as well as those of the group depend on the support of the individuals who are on the team. Zepeda (2007) made a salient point,

> Given the complexities of schools, leadership cannot be vested solely to the principal, and as the saying goes, No man stands alone. Principals assert their effectiveness by diffusing leadership to a larger set of stakeholders, namely teachers. Diffusing leadership is much different from delegating work and duties just to get things done or lighten the workload. Diffusing leadership entails trust, collaboration, support, and advocacy for extending the boundaries of authority beyond the position and the person who holds the title of principal. (p. 8)

My readings and participation in leadership courses have equipped me with the insight and importance of soliciting the input and suggestions of stakeholders. I am more mindful of the fact that when individuals are included in the process, buy in becomes more attainable and people see themselves as essential and valuable components of the organization. Because they are empowered, the implementation of initiatives becomes less tedious and quite often even the most apprehensive resisters are more inclined to have a genuine willingness to embrace change. Stowell and Mead (2007) believed that the creation of an effective and meaningful team calls for courage, commitment, dedication, and preference. It is not a smooth process and there is no secret formula. Too often information is triggered from the top down and no effort is made to utilize the resources of stakeholders.

Standard six of the Interstate School Leaders Licensure Consortium (ISLLC) requires leaders to promote the success of all students by acting with integrity, fairness, and in an ethical manner (CCSSO, 1996). Shapiro and Stefkovich (2005) advised leaders to advocate for ethical decision making by looking through the lens of the four

paradigms. The components that make up the multiple paradigm approach include the ethics of justice, critique, care, and the profession. By utilizing the different paradigms and approaches, I have become more cognizant of perspectives that I use most often when I attempt to solve ethical issues. The authors believed that the four perspectives will assist educational administrators to solve the real-life dilemmas that we continuously face. They have also encouraged me to take the time to reflect on concepts and practices particularly as I continuously grapple with issues and decisions.

It is imperative that I demonstrate the capacity to come to grips with all situations and not allow myself to be intimidated by clashes or conflicts that may arise among ethical codes. Shapario and Stefkovich (2005) suggested that leaders implement multiple ethical paradigms to guide us as we grapple with daily dilemmas. They further explained that with the complexity of certain situations, it is extremely important that educational leaders are able to think broadly and make decisions that will benefit stakeholders. This has propelled me in the direction of a strong, determined, and assertive leader who operates with unwavering integrity and who has gained the reputation for doing what is considered morally right even when I face opposition and criticism from very powerful forces. Ciulla (2003) contended,

> It is difficult to think about leadership without thinking about the greatest good for the greatest number of people. We usually choose leaders who we believe will bring about the greatest good for an organization, a country, or a community. (p. 141)

As I continue to grow as a leader, I have also become more aware of the importance of creating meaningful partnerships with parents and members of the community. I have grown to recognize and respect the fact that parents are their children's first teachers. It is also evident that many of the adults in the Hopeville

Community have always harbored a negative perception of the school and its leadership. That behavior is often replicated as their children progress throughout the educational system. Many find the educational process intimidating and quite frustrating. In my role as the gatekeeper of the organization, I have developed a genuine compassion and appreciation for parents and members of the community, however negative their perception of the school may be. Because I have grown to understand that their negativity often stems from personal failures and disappointment in the education system, I am now determined to positively influence their tainted perceptions by embracing and informing them of my determination to provide their youngsters with effective and meaningful learning experiences. Wright, Stegelin, and Hartle (2007) stated,

> Parents who function within the school system today are more informed and consumer oriented than their predecessors were. They, with the support of informed and supportive teachers, can make a difference for children and families because they are in a position to identify salient issues as a consumer and then to organize, collaborate, and communicate with decision makers so that services and programs for young children continuously improve. (p. 72)

The collection of readings has encouraged me to take the time to conduct frequent assessments of my team. The authors have reaffirmed my belief and view that teamwork can be compared to a marriage among a group of individuals. As a responsible and conscientious leader, I recognize my position as the individual responsible for setting the tone along with promoting the conception that team members are seen as uniquely talented and essential members of the organization. Additionally, teamwork takes intentional and deliberate efforts by all members.

I gained valuable knowledge and expertise in school reform and insights into organizational change and leadership. I am fully aware of my role as the agent of change. Fullan (2001) compared change to a double-edge sword; it can bring about improvement,

but at a pace that is difficult to keep up with. When things are unsettled we can discover ways to move ahead and create breakthroughs. When stakeholders are asked to brainstorm about change, their responses are usually a combination of negative and positive terms. Many express fear, anxiety, doubt, and panic, while others may express enthusiasm, excitement, growth, trust, and exhilaration. Regardless of the fact that the plan will ultimately have a positive effect on the current chaotic situation, I am aware of the fact that initiating change will challenge traditional practices and attitudes of stakeholders.

Wheatley (1999) believed that in a dissipative organization, occurrences and individuals that disturb the structure play a critical role in the reorganization and the creation of order. In other words, the chaos and turbulence can often be the source of new order. When the disturbance becomes so intolerable that it can no longer be ignored, if the organization is solid, it can self-organize into a new and improved form; hence, second order change is established. It can be described as an awakening of innovation and creativity. It is common knowledge that turmoil and information are usually spawned out of chaotic situations and are to be avoided at all costs. However, it is now my perception that they are often necessary for the progress of the organization. Furthermore, if I am to be an effective leader, I must no longer harbor a paralyzing fear of complexity. Instead of avoiding volatile situations, I welcome them as the key to new beginnings as the paradigm shift is made. As a courageous and innovative leader who is prepared to establish and sustain progress in the organization, I am often encouraged to "think outside the box" and have begun to take risks. One such venture was the implementation of single-gender classes at Hopeville Community School.

Leadership Study

Information was gathered to answer research question # 5: *How did my leadership practices as a principal influence the successful implementation of single-gender classes in an urban setting?* Teachers responded to questions regarding the leadership of Hopeville Community School. Items included Likert-type questions regarding topics such as leadership practices, capacity building, meaningful feedback, implementation of change, and the treatment of staff. It was also necessary to employ this survey because, as the instructional leader of the school, leadership style, values, and behavior of the principal have a substantial impact on student performance. This impact is mediated through teachers and support staff in the organization. Leadership is the application of high-level conceptual skills and decisiveness. It includes the ability to create a vision, develop strategy, inspire stakeholders, and most important, change the culture of the organization. It is also crucial that I institute a model for self-assessment and constructive accountability.

The Likert-type survey was completed by 14 of the middle school teachers who anonymously responded to questions regarding their perceptions and opinions of the effectiveness of the leadership, particularly as it pertained to the implementation of experimental single-gender classes. Leadership accountability is essential to improve student achievement. Question 1 on the Employee Satisfaction Survey in Appendix G gathered information on my practice of providing meaningful feedback to staff. Reeves (2006) discussed the importance of feedback; "Feedback is not about transmission of information. It is about using that information to change us" (p. 127). Principals must be

at ease and confident receiving quality feedback from teachers and other stakeholders so

as to improve their leadership practices.

According to the information provided in Table 9, the data clearly indicated a

consensus that I have demonstrated the practice of connecting strategies, communication,

and decision making. A total of 50% of the 14 respondents strongly agreed that they

receive constructive feedback from the school administrator and 50% agreed with the

statement. Downey et al. (2004) supported the importance of feedback and make the

following observation: "The goal of follow-up conversations is to assist the teaching staff

to engage in reflective inquiry" (p. 43).

Table 9

Feedback, Teamwork, Capacity Building and Change Initiatives

Teacher Response	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral or No Opinion	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
a) I receive useful and constructive feedback from the school administrator	50%	50%	0	0	0
b) Teamwork is practiced and encouraged in this organization	100%	0	0	0	0
d) I understand how my work directly contributes to the success of the organization	29%	50%	0	0	21%
f) capacity building is important in this organization	71%	29%	0	0	0
1) Change initiatives are introduced in a manner that fosters "buy in" and support of stakeholders	50%	36%	14%		

Marzano et al. (2005) discussed teamwork as one of the distinguishing features of effective leadership; "The effective leader is not only involved in establishing teams but also sees to their viability by providing necessary resource and support" (p. 16). Teamwork enhances individual talents and allows stakeholders to see the bigger picture where individualistic goals can be incorporated into collective aspirations. Teamwork in organizations leads to cohesiveness, camaraderie, and the creation of a shared vision. While they are aware that failures are inevitable, trust, creativity, and risk-taking become more prevalent due to the fact that failure is encountered by the team as opposed to being borne individually.

With the implementation of single-gender experimental classes, the creation of a guiding coalition ensured the task at hand was planned and executed with the assistance of a united effort and the maximum possible proficiency. There was also a unification of stakeholders hence optimization and efficiency was inevitable. This is unambiguously reflected in the Employee Satisfaction Survey results depicted in Table 9. The findings show that 100% of the teachers who participated in the survey believed that teamwork was practiced and encouraged at Hopeville.

Stakeholders are more apt to align their actions with the goals and vision of the organization when they see themselves as essential members of the school who are genuinely appreciated by the leader. They understand that their talents and expertise are valued and opportunities to maximize their potential continuous. Kotter (1996) emphasized the importance of stakeholders being cognizant of their contribution to the success of the organization. "Major internal transformation rarely happens unless many

people assist. Yet employees won't help or can't help if they feel relatively powerless. Hence the relevance of empowerment" (p. 102).

As also indicated in Table 9, 29% of the respondents strongly agreed that they understood how their work directly contributed to the overall success of the school. A total of 50% of them agreed, and 21% strongly disagreed with the statement. The staff at Hopeville wanted to see how their work contributed to larger communal objectives. Setting the right targets made this connection unambiguous and more explicit for them and also for me as the leader of the school. Goal-setting was a significant tool for providing ongoing feedback and for monitoring their progress. By establishing and monitoring targets, they received input on their performance while being motivated to achieve more; thus becoming more cognizant of the essential role that they each played in the transformation of Hopeville.

Capacity building is an ongoing process through which individuals and organizations enhance and improve their ability to meet and address challenges. Implementing a system of continuous staff development provides nourishment for the organization and encourages collaborative efforts to stay abreast of trends and best practices that will positively influence student achievement. Through this progression the entire organization becomes a rich source of knowledge and is better capable to achieve the goals of the organization. Reeves (2006) discussed the importance of capacity building on all levels of the organization; "The leader enjoys the optimal combination of high results and deep understanding of the antecedents of excellence, yet is perpetually seeking opportunities to improve" (p. 8).

As demonstrated in Table 9, findings from the Employee Satisfaction Survey provide evidence that the leader valued and promoted capacity building in this school. A total of 71% of the respondents strongly agreed that capacity building was valued in the organization. The remaining 29% agreed with the statement. In order for an organization to prosper and accomplish its goals, it is imperative that the leader is capable of identifying the crisis, creating the vision and changing systems that undermine the change vision, and working cohesively with stakeholders to achieve organizational goals. It is also vital that as change is initiated, the leader demonstrates respect for the needs of organization as well as the sentiments of the stakeholders. Effective leaders see change as a process and are cognizant of the stressors and anxiety that the complexity that the course of action may have on followers.

Evans (1996) stated, "Change is not a predicable enterprise with definite guidelines but a struggle to shape processes that are complex and elusive" (p. 15). Throughout the execution of single-gender classes, plans and implementation were modified and fine-tuned. It was essential to obtain buy in from stakeholders, hence, teacher leaders and representatives were chosen as representatives on the guiding coalition. They were instrumental in keeping all members of the organization abreast of the goals and intended outcomes of the initiative. As trust was established, stakeholders were empowered to make data driven decisions, take risks, and work cohesively. The findings as depicted in Table 9 clearly indicate that stakeholders believed that change initiatives were introduced in a manner that solicited their genuine efforts and support. A total of 50% of respondents strongly agreed with the statement, 36% of respondents agreed, and the remaining 14% had no opinion.

It is essential that the behaviors of the leader are aligned with the values, goals, and vision of the organization. We are resourceful, innovative, honest, flexible, and are able to demonstrate a genuine appreciation of the talents of followers. Stakeholders are usually the recipients of trust, reverence, and admiration. Table 10 provides findings from the Employee Satisfaction Survey on stakeholders' perception of the effectiveness of the principal of the school. A total of 57% of the respondents strongly agreed that the principal is a competent professional and an effective leader. A total of 29% of the respondents agreed, 7% had no opinion, and the remaining 7% of the 14 respondents disagreed with the statement. Fostering positive school culture that promotes student achievement and empowers staff is one of the guiding characteristics of competent and effective leadership. Marzano et al. (2005) identified the following behaviors associated with effective leadership,

- o Promoting cohesion among staff

- o Promoting a sense of well-being among staff

- o Developing an understanding of purpose among staff

- o Developing a shared vision of what the school could be like (p. 48).

Table 10

Leadership effectiveness

Teacher Response	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral or No Opinion	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
k) I respect the building principal as a competent professional who demonstrates effective leadership skills	57%	29%	7%	7%	0

Effective leaders contribute to productive collaborative activity in their schools by being skilled conveners of that work. They nurture mutual respect and trust among those involved in collaborating by being trustworthy themselves, ensure the shared determination of group processes and outcomes, help develop clarity about goals and roles for collaboration, encourage a willingness to compromise among collaborators, foster open and fluent communication among collaborators, and provide adequate and consistent resources in support of collaborative work. The findings from the completion of the Employee Satisfaction Survey (Appendix G) also reiterated the importance of creating a high-performance learning team in the school where administrators and teachers are held accountable to one another. The trust created in such an environment will allow me to ask the difficult question, "How am I doing as your leader? I am interested in hearing your thoughts, and your evaluation of my performance."

My adaptation of the transformational style is most likely the reason for responses to questions (a) *I receive useful and constructive feedback from the school administrator* and (d) *I understand how my work directly contributes to the overall success of the organization*. Transformational leadership taught me the importance of keeping the lines of communication with stakeholders open at all times and of providing clarity, hence, removing all ambiguity regarding expectations. It also calls for me to empower stakeholders, respect their opinions, embrace their individual talents, and ensure that they see themselves as essential and valued members of the organization.

As the resonant leader, I am cognizant of the importance of emotional intelligence as I grapple with issues and dilemmas in my daily practice. I am also aware of the emotions and feelings experienced by stakeholders as change is introduced in the school,

hence, the reason for the response of item (i) of the Employee Satisfaction Survey,

Change initiatives are introduced in a manner that fosters "buy in" and support of

stakeholders. My education, work experience, and most importantly the work of gurus

such as Robert Evans, John P. Kotter, Peter Senge, Jim Collins, and Michael Fullan has

taught me that if change is thrust upon someone then the process of dealing with it

becomes that much more difficult. That is why it is important to follow certain key steps

when it comes to implementing change in the workplace.

My adaptation of the instructional leadership model emerged during the teachers'

response to item (f) *Capacity building is important in this organization.* The role of

the instructional leader calls for me to see myself as a perpetual learner and a reflective

practitioner who understands the importance of building capacity among stakeholders in

the organization. It is crucial that I take advantage of opportunities to stay abreast of

initiatives, trends, and best practices that may positively influence student achievement.

Alvy and Harvey (1995) concurred:

> Implementing a system of professional growth options provides recognition of the
> need to nourish the professional growth of every individual in the school and to
> stimulate a collaborative effort to pursue learning about learning. Through this
> process, the entire institution becomes a richer knowledge source with increased
> capacity to serve its adult and student learners. (p. 126)

The findings from item (b) regarding the importance of teamwork in the

organization can be credited to my implementation of the characteristics of a servant

leader. Servant leadership is characterized by the ability and willingness to embrace my

level of commitment and passion for the work in the organization and to expect

stakeholders replicate my behavior and actions. I was involved in all aspects of the

186

implementation of single-gender classes and worked cohesively with stakeholders so the initiative was successfully implemented at Hopeville.

The leadership styles along with my assumption of the situational leadership approach can be credited for the response from item (k), as revealed on Table 10, regarding stakeholders' overall perception of my effectiveness as a leader. I credit my ability to display human relations as the key to every level of my leadership. It is the fiber that runs throughout the organization and directly affects the culture, practices, climate, operation, and every stakeholder in the school. It is common knowledge that when stakeholders feel valued and they receive opportunities to attain the level of self-actualization, they are more apt to take risks, experiment, collaborate, and embrace initiatives. Consequently these behaviors are bound to positively influence staff productivity as well as student achievement.

Self-Assessment

My current leadership role has inspired me to pursue the study of leadership theories and best practices. Along with Kotter, Collins, Senge, Fullan, Goleman, Wren, Evans, Reeves, Wheatley, and other gurus who have been identified as experts in the field of leadership, the individual who has had the most profound impact on my leadership style and practice is Giuliani (2002), who emphasized the importance of taking the time to analyze my strengths and challenges. In other words, it is imperative that I engage in reflective practice and regularly conduct self-assessments. This concept mirrored my reflective practices, which I find quite beneficial in my professional as well as my personal life. Giuliani also accentuated the necessity of developing my own expertise and of taking the time to learn enough about the fundamentals. Wheatley (1999)

187

discussed the importance of self-assessment; "We posses consciousness and are capable of reflection. We are able to think about a past and a future. No longer anchored to just the present moment, we can dream about what we want and imbue events with meaning" (p. 147).

The acquisition of knowledge has afforded me a frame of reference and the ability to distinguish between authentic and make believe. An essential part of my leadership platform is my ability to make informed and data driven decisions. I am aware of the relation between qualitative and quantitative research and the way in which methods are best utilized in the area of educational leadership. These skills were essential in the implementation of single-gender experimental classes. Data usage has become the focal point for faculty discussions on improving student academic achievement and also for positively enhancing staff productivity. In other words, data continues to provide a rich source of information regarding strategies, programs, and performance. It paints an accurate picture of the organization and can be used to develop and support a sense of urgency in the organization.

It is common knowledge that actions and traits are best understood when information is gathered or observations are conducted in the environment or settings in which they occur. In my quest to improve instruction for students, I continuously conduct both formal and informal assessments and observations. When data are collected, as was during the study of experimental single-gender classes, I was able to create plans of action that lead to the formation of informed decisions. My experiences with both quantitative and qualitative research has equipped me with the knowledge necessary to stay abreast of educational trends and best practices while assisting with the

implementation of data driven decisions. Stringer (2004) aptly noted, "As they participate in action research, people develop high degrees of motivation and are often empowered to work in ways they never thought possible" (p. 31).

Reflective practice involves the skill of taking the time to reflect on practices with the intention of improving leadership skills. In addition to providing opportunities for self-assessment I gained valuable insight and knowledge pertinent to improving my professional judgment. I learn from successes and mistakes, which is essential as I plan for the future of the organization. My judgment is informed as is the probability of informed actions when situations may be different or unique. In other words I am now capable of recognizing the strengths and skills that I can apply when necessary so as to conduct meaningful research in order to modify practice. Robbins and Alvy (1995) agreed, "Reflection is a precious resource in settings where most of the activities are characterized as fast paced, involving a constant stream of decision making" (p. 126).

Leadership Legacy

When I think of my legacy, my thoughts immediately focus on the prevailing words of Frederick Douglas, former slave and abolitionist who made the following statement: "If there is no struggle, there is no progress." The attempt to dissipate habits and practices that have languished throughout the organization has been challenging and quite frustrating. However disheartening my experiences, I would like to be remembered as the courageous and informed leader who learned from the gurus, weathered the storm, empowered stakeholders, and successfully implemented and sustained second order change.

My extensive study of leadership theories and styles has been a tremendous advantage as I continue the journey to transform my school into one that is high performing. As a result of my completion of the doctoral degree at Rowan University, I am now more proficient in the craft of empowering stakeholders to view change as inevitable and ensuring that their practices, beliefs, and actions are systemic and are aligned with the goals and vision of the organization. We have already experienced incremental growth within the school. In his poignant statement, Fullan (2001) reminded me of the fact that change is a process and not an event.

Conclusion

As I deliberated on my journey throughout the completion of this research study, I have arrived at the conclusion that in many ways, more was achieved than I predicted. The results obtained regarding areas such as the effect of the implementation of single-gender classes on student behavior, self-efficacy, academic engagement and performance, and relationships with peers and teachers far exceeded my expectations. Perhaps the area where my expectations were surpassed was the ability of the staff to improve their practices and align their actions with the vision of the school. Their efforts to positively influence all aspects of student academic achievement and social emotional development were deliberate, genuine, and systemic throughout the school. Even marginal and disenfranchised members of the faculty embraced the implementation of single-gender classes at Hopeville.

According to Wheatley (1999), a system changes when it learns more about itself by implementing processes that facilitate self-discovery and creates new and meaningful relationships. As a result of their willingness to embrace change, the old way of doing

things has been permanently disrupted and second-order change was established. The rejuvenation and resilience of the stakeholders at Hopeville have become an integral part of their thoughts and attitudes toward future change initiatives. My leadership has increased their awareness of capacity building, self-reflection, working cohesively, and their roles as essential constituents in the successful transformation of Hopeville Community School.

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Appendix A

Brain-Based Genetic Differences in Girls and Boys

Note: "Sex differences in childhood are larger and more important than sex differences in adulthood." Leonard Sax

Girls Tend To	Boys Tend To
Have better hearing than boys and may find "loud" or repetitive noises distracting.	Have worse hearing than girls and may lose attention simply because they can't hear.
Are better at object discrimination, i.e. "What is it?"	Are better at object location, i.e. "Where is it?"
Will focus on faces and things. "Girls draw nouns using warm colors."	Will focus on movement. "Boys draw verbs using cold colors."
Use more of the advanced part of their brains, such as the cerebral cortex.	Use more of the primitive parts of their brains, e.g. the hippocampus and amygdala.
Can explain and describe their feelings.	Find it difficult to talk about feelings.
Are more verbal emotive.	Are more spatial mechanical.
Develop language and fine motor skills about 6 years earlier than boys.	Develop targeting and spatial memory about 4 years earlier than girls.
Multitask well and make easy transitions.	Focus on a task and transition more slowly.
Friendships are focused on other girls.	Friendships are focused on a shared activity.
Conversation is central to a friendship.	Conversation is often unnecessary.
Social hierarchies will destroy a friendship.	Social hierarchies build camaraderie and organize relationships.
Self-revelation and sharing are precious part of a friendship.	Self-revelation is to be avoided if possible.
Often ask a teacher for help and enjoy a close relationship with a teacher.	May not ask for help to avoid being perceived as "sucking up" to a teacher.
Like to be faced, looked in the eye and smiled at.	Avoid eye contact and prefer you sit beside them.
Retain sensory memory details well and make good distinctions between colors.	Don't retain sensory details or make color distinctions as well.
Deal with moderate stress, such as timed tests, less successfully.	Deal with moderate stress well and may actually do better because of it.
Want to be with friends when under stress.	Want to be alone when under stress.
Feel "yucky" when faced with threat and confrontation.	Feel excited when faced with threat and confrontation.
Rarely employ aggression playfully.	Often employ aggression playfully.
Connect sex to other outcomes.	Focus on the sexual activity itself.
Use landmarks to give directions.	Use compass points to give directions.
Prefer to read fiction—short stories and novels.	Prefer nonfiction—descriptions of real events, action, and how things work.
Have many friends if they bully and likely bully someone they know.	Have few friends if they bully and more likely don't know the person they attack.
Need encouragement to build them up.	Need reality checks to make them reassess and to be challenged.

Appendix B

Enhancing Teaching and Parenting for Girls

From Gurian and Stevens (2005):

- Use puzzles to foster perceptual and symbolic learning.
- Promote leadership by creating working groups and teams.
- Verbally encourage girls who exhibit low self-esteem or who underestimate their abilities.
- Promote physical activities that foster gross motor skills.
- Use manipulatives, especially in Science and Math.
- Provide role models of girls succeeding at activities or school subjects normally associated with male success.
- Provide opportunities for girls to study together.
- Expect girls to ask for help and want to affiliate with a teacher.
- If a girl is the "odd one out" of her social group, don't dismiss it. Ask about her problems and her possible enemies.
- Don't shield girls from "skinning their knees", which might foster a learned helplessness.
- Promote girls to actively explore their world even at the risk of failure or minor injury.
- Let girls create their own challenges in which they can take safe risks.
- Be aware that loud or repetitive noises may distract girls since their hearing is more acute than most boys.
- Provide role playing activities for girls.
- Provide an abundance of fiction at a variety of reading levels so that girls have materials they enjoy reading rather than just school content to study.
- Connect Science and Math to the real world so that girls can understand the relationships between and impact upon people.
- Be aware of how much stress a girl is feeling as it may degrade her performance.
- Use a supportive, non-confrontational approach to change a girl's behavior rather than a confrontational in-your-face style. Smile and look a girl in the eye.
- Don't assume an adolescent girl is not having sex. Remember that "oral sex" is considered "hooking up" and not seen as a "sexual activity" by many teens.
- Kids don't date anymore. Girls will "hook up" without having a relationship in order to feel socially powerful in their peer group. The most common time and place for teen sex is after school in someone's house.
- Allowing a girl to participate in girls-only activities, such as soccer, volleyball, etc. makes them less likely to be sexually active.
- Know everything about a party your daughter is attending.
- The number one risk factor for girls using drugs is low self-esteem. They also tend to use drugs to relieve stress or because their friends are doing it. Be aware of their feelings and learn as much as possible about their friends.
- Academic stress is a common pathway to drug abuse among girls.
- Provide alternative ways for girls to relax, such as hiking, sports, meditation, concerts, etc.
- Eat supper together so that you know where your daughter is everyday and can learn with whom she associates and what they may be doing.

• Don't transfer your authority to a child. Establish the prohibitive rule: Stick to it. Then offer an alternative activity.

Appendix C

Enhancing Teaching and Parenting for Boys

From Guiran and Stevens (2005):

- Use manipulatives that require boys to employ fine motor skills.
- Provide a larger learning space when possible.
- Make lessons kinesthetic and experiential: Structure activities for movement.
- Use technology as learning and teaching tool. Balance study and screen time.
- Use graphic organizers that compartmentalize concepts into small sections.
- Keep verbal instructions short. Don't layer instructions. Write layered instructions as numbered steps on the board or worksheet.
- Surround boys with reading material they will enjoy, such as real life nonfiction, adventure, sports, or how-to books. Provide a variety of reading levels.
- Expose boys to a variety of male mentors from many walks of life that illustrate different ways to be successful.
- Many boys may not hear as well as girls and need to be moved closer to the front of a room.
- Provide differentiated writing assignments in which girls can write about description, sensory details, feelings and boys can describe events or action.
- Be aware that boys will continually test their manhood by doing risky actions and that they overestimate their abilities.
- Boys in groups do stupid things. Begin any new physical activity with lessons from a trained teacher.
- Supervise boys to lessen personal injuries.
- Boys learn the "rules of the game" through aggressive play. Aggression and competition builds camaraderie and organizes their peer relationships. Don't ban PE and other physical activities from the school day or boys' aggressive drive will show up elsewhere inappropriately.
- Be aware of the video games boys play. Don't buy any video game that promotes a "moral inversion" where bad is good and good is bad.
- Ask boys about their studies since they most likely study alone and don't ask for help from teachers.
- Ask boys about their lives when they want to be alone. Stress tends to cause boys to choose isolation.
- Avoid small group activities for boys unless each one has a different but equal goal to achieve yet all members together are held responsible for a team score.
- Provide a moderate level of stress through timing or some sort of challenge to engage a boy's interest.
- For many boys and some men, the sexual act is closely tied to aggression. Kids don't date anymore. Boys will "hook up" simply for the sexual activity and the prestige it may bring among peers. The most common time and place for teen sex is after school in someone's house.
- Eat supper together so that you know where your son is everyday and can learn with whom he associates and what they may be doing.
- Boys who abuse drugs are thrill-seeking or want to be cool. Provide healthy, alternative physical and intellectual "thrills" for young males.

• Give clear and consistent discipline to boys.
• Don't transfer your authority to a boy. Establish the prohibitive rule. Stick to it. Look him in the eye and tell him so. Then offer an alternative activity. (p. 276)

Appendix D

Student Pre and Post Survey

1) What is your gender? (Mark only one)
   _____ Male
   _____ Female

2) What is your current grade level? (Mark only one)
   6th_____   7th_____   8th_____

3) What is your race? (Mark only one; **optional**)
   _____ Asian   _____ Black
   _____ Hispanic   _____ White
   _____ Native American _____ Biracial _____ Multiracial _____Other

4) At what grade level did you begin to participate in the single-gender education program? (Mark only one)

   _____ Pre K- 2nd grade   _____ Grades 3rd-5th
   _____ Grades 6th -8th   _____ Don't know

5). Directions: This questionnaire asks for your opinions on school. Since an opinion is neither right nor wrong, there is no right or wrong answer. Your honest reactions will be greatly appreciated.

SA= Strongly Agree   A= Agree   N= Neutral   D= Disagree   SD= Strongly Disagree

Mark only one choice per item. (Circle one response for each item)

	SA	A	N	D	SD
a. I enjoy school.					
b. I get along well with my classmates.					
c. I get passing grades in more than half of my classes.					
d. I perform well on tests and quizzes.					
e. Performing well in school is important to me.					
f. My teachers will describe me as a student who works hard to complete assignments.					
g. I enjoy being part of a group					
h. I am a motivated student who does my best and follows the rules of my school.					
i. My teachers will describe me as a discipline problem in the classroom.					
j. I will recommend single-gender classes to other students.					

6) **Rate your level of satisfaction with each of the following, circle only one response for each item.**

Items	Extremely Satisfied	Moderately Satisfied	Not At All Satisfied	Don't Know
a. School environment				
b. Classroom environment				
c. My level of engagement				
d. Opportunities to voice my ideas and opinions				
e. My relationships with classmates				
f. My relationships with teachers				
g. School safety				
h. My level of comfort in single-gender classes				
i. Sharing my ideas and opinions without the fear of being teased or laughed at				
j. Overall satisfaction with single-gender classes				

Thank you for your assistance with this important research.

Appendix E

Single-Gender Teacher Survey

1. Indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree with each of the following statements. *(circle one response for each item)*

Teacher Response	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral or No Opinion	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
a) Single-gender education encourages the understanding of concepts taught in other disciplines					
b) Single-gender education has positively influenced student performance on teacher made tests and quizzes					
c) Single-gender education has positively influenced student performance on district assessments					

2. To what degree did single-gender classes positively impact the progress of students in the following areas? *(circle one response for each item)*

	Very Much	Much	Some	None
a. student level of engagement				
b. student self-efficacy				
c. student behavior				
d. student participation in class				
e. students relationships with peers				
f. students relationships with teachers				

Thank you for your assistance with this important research.

Appendix F

Single-Gender Parent Survey

1. Indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree with each of the following statements. *(circle one response for each item)*

Parent Response	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral or No Opinion	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
a) Single-gender education improved student performance on teacher made tests and quizzes					
b) Single-gender education encourages student completion of home-work assignments					

2. To what degree did single-gender education positively impact the progress of students in the following areas? *(circle one response for each item)*

	Very Much	Much	Some	None
a. student academic progress				
b. student behavior				
c. student attitude towards peers				
d. student attitude towards school				
e. student attitude towards teachers				

Thank you for your assistance with this research study of single-gender classes.

Appendix G

Employee Satisfaction Survey

1. Indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree with each of the following
statements. *(check one response for each item)*

Staff Response	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral or No Opinion	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
a) I receive useful and constructive feedback from the school administrator					
b) Teamwork is practiced and encouraged in this organization					
c) I have a good understanding of the mission and goals of this organization					
d) I understand how my work directly contributes to the overall success of the organization					
e) The necessary information systems are in place and accessible for me to get my job done					
f) Capacity building is important in this organization					
g) The environment in this work place supports a healthy balance between work and personal life					
h) I am treated fairly					
i) Change initiatives are introduced in a manner that foster "buy in" and support of stakeholders					
j) Change initiatives are purposeful and sustainable					

k) I respect the building principal as a competent professional who demonstrates effective leadership skills					

Thank you for your assistance with this study of single-gender classes.

Appendix H

Student Interview Protocol

Thank you for allowing me to interview you regarding your personal experience in a single-gender classroom. Your confidentiality will be protected. Participating in this discussion will have no effect on your grades or your academic standing in the school. Please be advised that in addition to taking notes, the discussions will be recorded electronically.

1) Were you given the choice to participate in single-gender classes? Explain.

2) What was your overall perception of single-gender classes?

3) Briefly describe your school experience. (You may discuss your grades, level of comfort and overall attitude towards school).

4) Discuss your level of engagement in classes. (You may describe the teaching-learning process)

5) How would your describe your relationship with teachers?

6) How would you describe the relationship with classmates?

7) Do you enjoy being a part of a group of same-gender students? Explain

8) Are you distracted by classmates of the opposite sex? Explain

9) Are you able to share your ideas and opinions without the fear of being teased or laughed at? Explain

10) Would your teachers describe you as a motivated student who puts forth your best effort? Explain

11) Have you ever been suspended from school? If yes, how many times and briefly describe each infraction?

12) Has participation in a single-gender class impacted your level of academic achievement? Explain

13) Has participation in single-gender class impacted your behavior? Explain

14) Has single-gender education affected your attitude? Explain

15) How confident are you that you will be able to surpass all expectations and achieve your goals? Explain

16) What personal changes, if any, have you noticed since your participation in single – gender classes? Explain

17) What changes, if any, have you noticed with your classmates since their participation in single-gender classes? Explain

18) What changes, if any, have you noticed with your teachers since the implementation of single-gender classes? Explain

19) Did the naming of single-gender classes after historic black colleges and universities have any effect your level of motivation, self-efficacy, or determination to succeed? Explain

20) Briefly describe what you believe are the advantages and/or disadvantages of single-gender education.

21) Would you recommend single-gender classes to a friend? Please explain the reason for your answer.

22) What are your career aspirations? Explain the reason for your choice.

Thank you for your participation in this study.

Appendix I

NJASK Participant Performance Data

NJASK Standardized Assessments

Student	Math		LAL	
	2009	**2010**	**2009**	**2010**
W.M.	206	214	212	200
T.B.	102	145	104	144
S.F.	144	158	168	172
Z.B.	197	218	214	187
A.A.	171	194	183	171
A.C.	170	177	162	144
F.B.	189	221	197	168
B.W.	195	209	200	200
D.M.	197	225	207	156
A.M.W.	200	244	252	175
C.J.	177	191	192	181
B.L.	157	183	179	135
V.O.	178	200	141	188
J.D.	162	195	158	152
L.B.	180	185	166	152
J.M.	161	172	160	128
J.W.	189	172	166	171
J.J.	168	204	201	161
A.D.	183	191	192	144
R.P.	160	171	174	173
D.L.	150	197	172	191
L.F.	242	165	189	261
O.S.	206	207	200	175
V.M.	148	163	150	147
T.D.	171	189	174	168
H.B.	149	177	165	135
A.D.	191	180	167	128
R.G.	271	220	222	241
S.M.	154	187	162	173
A.C.	168	208	182	173
I.H.	160	179	149	165
L.H.	186	203	222	231
T.S.	178	169	182	169
B.S.	177	198	175	181
S.S.	174	154	192	153
S.J.	171	187	187	169
L.D.	149	193	187	135
J.D.	183	169	192	168
K.O.	189	169	181	178
E.J.	184	239	225	202
J. M.	192	183	207	191
M. C.	172	200	197	194

Hopeville Community School Discipline Atom June 2009

Date	Name	Grade	Infraction	Consequence	O. O. S/I.S.S.
6/04/09	V.O.	7th	Physical assault on a classmate	2 Days	Out of school suspension
6/04/09	T.B.	7th	Physical assault on a classmate	2 Days	Out of school suspension
6/05/09	A.A.	6th	Threats to staff	1 Day	Out of school suspension
6/05/09	W. J.	7th	Use of Profanity	2 Days	In school suspension
6/05/09	A.V.	8th	Bullying	3 Days	In school suspension
6/08/09	W. M.	6th	Cutting Class	1 Day	In school suspension
6/08/09	T. C.	6th	Cutting Class	1 Day	In school suspension
6/09/09	S.F.	8th	Fighting	2 Days	Out of school suspension
6/09/09	T. J.	8th	Fighting	2 Days	Out of school suspension
6/11/09	B. S.	6th	Destroying School Property	2 Days	Out of school suspension
6/12/09	I. H	7th	Use of Profanity	2 Days	In school suspension
6/12/09	D.L.	6th	Fighting	2 Days	Out of school suspension
6/15/09	J.M.	8th	Threats to staff	2 Days	Out of school suspension

6/16/09	H. B.	8th	Stealing in cafeteria	4 Days	Out of school suspension
6/16/09	J.J.	6th	Fighting	3 Days	Out of school suspension
6/18/09	W. M.	8th	Threats to administrator	3 Days	Out of school suspension
6/19/09	C. R.	7th	Fighting	2 Days	Out of school suspension
6/19/09	T. J.	8th	Fighting	4 Days	Out of school suspension
6/22/09	K.O.	7th	Cutting Class	3 Days	In school suspension
6/22/09	W.L.	6th	Use of profanity	2 Days	In school suspension
6/22/09	S.F.	7th	Physical assault on a classmate	4 Days	Out school suspension
6/22/09	B.L.	6th	Defacing school property	1 Day	Out of school suspension

Appendix K

Hopeville Community School Discipline Atom June 2010

Date	Name	Grade	Infraction	Consequence	O.O.S/ I.S.S.
6/09/10	J.J.	7th	Fighting	2 Days	Out of school suspension
6/11/10	R. M.	6th	Fighting	2 Days	Out of school suspension
6/15/11	K.O.	8th	Cyber Bullying	3 Days	Out of school suspension
6/16/10	I. H.	8th	Cyber Bullying	3 Days	Out of school suspension
6/16/10	J. C.	6th	Cyber Bullying	3 Days	Out of school suspension
6/16/10	B.L.	7th	Cutting classes	2 Days	In school suspension
6/18/10	C.V.	6th	Fighting	3 Days	Out of school suspension