

AN EXPLORATORY STUDY COMPARING A LOW INCOME BLACK DOMINANT
URBAN SCHOOL TO A LOW INCOME WHITE DOMINANT URBAN SCHOOL IN
TERMS OF SCHOOL QUALITY

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I would like to thank my family for supporting me through this journey.

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Urban Schools are often judge on the perceived shortcomings of students' academic skills and family social economic status. This image is judged more negatively when students are mainly Black students from low-income homes. One of the main sources of that judgement is the overall letter grade each school receives as part of state accountability systems. When urban schools have a preponderance of low income white students (LIW) with higher letter grades than urban schools with a preponderance of Black students from low income homes (LIB), the typical conclusion is that the LIW schools are "better" than the LIB schools.

To see if this is validated in other areas of schooling, I selected four areas that it would be possible to use to "compare" in an *exploratory* fashion these two types of urban schools. Those four are: 1) teacher quality, 2) AP enrollment and completion data, 3) technology usage, and 4) graduation rates, for all of which data is available and/or can be collected. Thus, I will be exploring whether the school's letter grade does distort the understanding or perception of quality for these two types of schools.

The findings of the study indicated that the LIB urban high school was not equal or better than LIW urban high school. Even though there was growth in the four focus areas and in the state accountability grade for LIB urban high school, the LIW urban high school outperformed the LIB urban high school in all areas. This study also confirmed

that the LIB urban high schools continue to have the less effective teachers in the classrooms, which leads to little to no change in educational quality.

Jim Scheurich, Ph. D., Chair

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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Urban schools are often judged on the perceived shortcomings of students' academic skills and socioeconomic status (Milner, 2012). For some, the term urban schools often evokes images of dilapidated school buildings located in poor inner-city neighborhoods populated with mainly African American or Hispanic students (Jacob, 2007). This image is judged more negatively when students are mainly Black students from low-income homes. One of the main areas of that judgement is the overall letter grade each school receives as part of state accountability systems (Indiana Administrative Code, 2015). When urban schools have a preponderance of low income White students (LIW) with higher letter grades than urban schools with a preponderance of Black students from low income homes (LIB), the typical conclusion is that the LIW schools are "better" than the LIB schools (Filgio & Hart, 2015; Milner, 2012; Rockoff & Turner, 2010). However, based on the author's professional experience as a school administrator working in both of these types of urban schools, the state accountability letter grade may not accurately reflect the quality of the two types of schools. Consequently, the focus for this study is to compare one reasonably similar example of each of these two kinds of schools (LIW and LIB) to explore whether the letter grade distorts differences in quality. Four areas were thus selected to compare LIW and LIB schools in an exploratory study. Those four areas were: 1) teacher quality, 2) Advanced Placement (AP) enrollment and completion data, 3) technology usage, and 4) graduation rates.

The rationale for selecting teacher quality is it has a large effect on student achievement (Buddin & Zammarro, 2009). Next, AP enrollment and completion data are a category that contributes to the high school overall grade in Indiana (Indiana

Administrative Code, 2015). Third, technology is the main tool used to assess students on state assessments, and using technology has become an essential education outcome (Ross, Morrison, Lowther, 2010). Lastly, the graduation rate is selected because it contributes to the high school overall grade in Indiana (Indiana Administrative Code, 2015).

It is important, however, to highlight that this is an exploratory study. Thus, this study did not establish cause and effect to prove that the letter grade distorts the perception of the quality of these two types of urban schools. Instead, this study explored whether there may be suggestive value to this possibility in terms of whether the letter grade distorted the understanding or perception of quality in these two types of schools.

The data collected to undertake this exploration are in the four designated areas of teacher quality data, AP enrollment and completion data, technology usage data, and graduation rate data. In addition, data were collected from individual interviews of one participant, the principal, from each school district. These individual interviews provided additional insights and perceptions of the four designated areas of data. The timeline for collecting this data are as follows 1) IRB approval by end of summer, 2018; 2) data collection from August 2018 through December 2018; 3) analysis and writing complete by July 2019; 4) Defense of dissertation Fall of 2019.

Summary of Literature

The history of accountability in education, federal requirements of No Child Left Behind (NCLB), assessment measurement, urban community make-up, teacher quality, AP enrollment, access to technology, and graduation rates were examined to establish background information to support the study. Review of literature related to the history of

assessment accountability in education that began in the 1920s was completed first. In the 1960s, the introduction of high-stakes testing was preceded by decades of earlier attempts to improve education in the United States (Minarechova, 2012). This high-stakes testing led to the adoption of an education law for elementary and secondary schools, called the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 (ESEA), which consisted of the subsequent development and introduction of minimum qualification tests. President George W. Bush signed NCLB in 2002. According to the United States Department of Education (2001), NCLB (2001) provided each state's schools with guidance to establish annual assessments, demand progress, improve poorly performing schools, create consequences for failure, and protect home and private schools.

With the new guidance in the NCLB, the information on the federal requirements of this policy were further examined. As part of the accountability requirements, states must have an annual assessment in mathematics and language arts in grades 3-10, and each state may select or design assessments of their choosing (NCLB, 2001). In addition, the states must provide a plan on how to improve literacy in early grades. The NCLB policy includes that states must develop a system of sanctions and rewards to hold districts and schools accountable for improving academic achievement for all students. Overall, the NCLB (2001) policy was designed to ensure all students were growing, and that schools were held accountable for academic growth or lack thereof for students.

However, for students to show academic growth, assessments had to be designed to measure it. Information on how assessments measure students' academic growth was examined. Popham (1999) defines a standardized test as "any examination that is administered and scored in a predetermined, standards manner" (p. 8). Additional

literature defines a standardized test as any form of a test that requires all test takers to answer the same questions and is scored in a standard manner that makes it possible to compare the performance of individuals or groups of students (Russell, 2010). One type of standardized assessment is an achievement test. An achievement test measures the knowledge and skills students learn in school, or it determines the academic progress they have made over a period of time (Edglossary.org, 2015). There are two types of achievement tests: summative and formative. Summative tests can be used to identify topics and skills that students have mastered or areas where they need development (Russell, 2010). Formative testing is the process of collecting information about a student's knowledge and understanding prior to or during instruction for the purpose of informing instruction or assisting students in improving their work (Russell, 2010). There are two types of inferences educators can glean from testing results. These types are the students' relative strengths and weaknesses within a given subject area with a sufficient number of test items and student's growth over time in different content areas (Popham, 1999). In recent research (Russell, 2010), it has been found that a student's socioeconomic status is highly correlated with standardized test scores, as many test items focus on assessing knowledge or skills learned outside of schools.

If a student's outside (i.e., non-school) learning in the community is considered in state standardized assessments, it is essential to define an urban community since the study is situated there. An urban area is defined as an area that is very well developed with a density of human structures such as houses, commercial buildings, roads, bridges, and railways (National Geographic, 2017). In addition, an urban community is often defined as students of color and students from low-income families in densely populated

areas primarily attending urban schools (Buddin & Zamarro, 2009). The term “urban” also carries additional meaning in the field of education. Milner (2012) best describes urban schools in three ways, which are urban intensive, urban emergent, and urban characteristic. Urban intensive is descriptive of schools in highly concentrated metropolitan cities with an average of one million plus people in the area. Urban emergent is descriptive of schools located in an area with fewer than one million people and some issues with scarcity of resources. An urban characteristic school is descriptive of schools located in a mid-sized city that starts to experience some of the challenges associated with intensive and urban emergent schools.

However, some perceive urban schools as being composed of a high concentration of African Americans and other racial and ethnic groups, high poverty rate of African American students and other racial and ethnic groups, and a high student mobility rate (Kincheloe, 2004; Lalas, 2007). Another common perception is that African American students encounter low student achievement, inadequate school readiness, lack discipline, and language barriers (Thompson et al., 2005). In addition, it is perceived that urban schools have less educated and poorly trained teachers (Milner, 2006). Furthermore, Hill, Friedland, and Phelps (2012) stated that White teacher candidates have stereotypical perceptions of urban schools, such as a commitment to doing missionary work, culture blindness, and apprehension about educating students of color. When there are such perceptions about poorly trained teachers or missionary teachers, there are also perceptions of high turnover rates of teachers in urban schools. This high turnover rate and the lack of preparation of teachers in African American urban schools tend to lead to racism in classrooms (Allen & Griffin, 2006, Caruthers & Friend, 2012; Jacob, 2007).

Given these perceptions, it is not surprising that Black students respond negatively to urban teachers. According to Patterson, Hale, and Stesson (2007):

Black students express that when Black students fail, the teachers assume all students are bad. It is not right how they criticize us and put us in categories. Some of us do care about our grades. We want to graduate and we want to make good grades, but teachers just do not make it fair enough for us to do that. (p. 5)

That teachers have such attitudes is supported by Ford and Quinn (2010) who stated that White teachers are more likely to hold low expectations for students of color than for White students.

Ford and Quinn (2010) concluded that White Americans traditionally question the intelligence of students of color. Moreover, when White students are described as more intellectual, it creates limited access to Advanced Placement (AP) courses for African American students and low economic status students (Allen and Griffin, 2006). It is clear then that racialized perceptions and treatment of African American students and other students of color impact not only public perceptions of urban schools, but also impact educators working in urban schools.

In response to this impact on teachers, qualities needed from urban teachers were examined. Quality means a distinctive attribute or characteristic possessed by someone or something (Merriam-Webster, 2017). Peske and Haycock (2006) found large discrepancies in the qualifications of teachers in diverse, high poverty schools versus teachers serving in schools with few students of color and students from low-income backgrounds. However, low-income students and students of color have higher performance gains with higher teacher quality. According to Grant and Gillette (2006), effective teachers take into account that academics, as well as social achievements, do not occur in a vacuum and are affected by various societal structures, with social structure

being, “a system of socioeconomic stratification, class-structure, social institutions, or other patterned relations between large social groups” (Talbert-Johnson, 2006, p. 153). Ohrt and Lambie (2009) wrote that Latinx and African American students often experience oppressive practices inside and outside schools that prevent them from pursuing high-level classes. Those oppressive practices were retention, standardized testing, tracking, and discipline policies. Further, some oppressive practices consisted of school educators having low expectations for African American students’ abilities and aspirations. In other research, Brak, Garnett, and Burley (2011) identified financial resources, limited vision toward higher education, and unrealistic academic goals for schools in offering AP courses. Thus, a student in a particular social structure may have limited access to quality teachers and limited access to AP courses.

After reviewing the lack of quality teachers in urban schools, the areas of enrollment and access for students of color in AP courses in high schools was explored. AP courses are rigorous, college-level classes in a variety of subjects that give students an opportunity to gain the skills and experiences colleges recognizes (College Board, 2017). Griffin and Allen (2006) wrote that urban schools lack rigorous courses because of the larger class sizes, outdated libraries, and minimum offerings of AP courses. In addition, urban students tend to have difficulty with AP accessibility due to poor treatment by teachers and gaps in skills for AP classes due to teachers’ lack of desire to educate them well (Ford & Quinn, 2010). In contrast, Ohrt and Lambie (2009) noted that educational programs that promote equal access to higher education for traditionally underserved students do exist. Two examples are Advancement Via Individual Determination (AVID) and Early College programs. In these educational programs,

students of color gain more access to AP classes and exposure to technology as an expectation.

Teachers and students from higher income families have been found to use technology in school and at home more than students from lower income families (Song & Owens, 2011). Teachers and students of color in urban schools with low-income backgrounds have experienced less access to computers as compared to Whites from higher income backgrounds in rural and suburban schools. Urban schools with students from lower income families are only half as likely to have Internet access compared to schools that serve students from higher income families (American Council of Education, 2003). Moreover, African Americans and Latinx students who are poor and considered working class, lack access to information and technology resources (Owen & Song, 2011). According to Owen and Song:

In order for technology to have a major influence on the educational system, teachers and students must not only have access to technology, but access to technology in a contextual matter that is cultural relevant, responsive, and meaningful to their educational practice to promote quality teaching and active student learning. (2011, p. 24)

The lack of technology exposure to keep students engaged in school could contribute to high school dropout.

The last area examined was the graduation rate of urban students. NCLB (2001) requires districts to annually prepare and disseminate local report cards with information that includes the graduation rates as part of state accountability. In response, descriptions of urban schools, including high dropout rates and low graduation rates, have unfortunately become the norm (Patterson, Hale, & Stessman, 2007). This norm is derived from the “assumption that the dropout problem is due to the student and his or her family” (p. 2). Heilig (2011) mentions that when analyzing urban schools

accountability for students' progression to earning high school diplomas, students could be coded as disappearing from the district or not enrolled in the district. This type of coding gives a picture of a school with a high dropout rate because the school does not know the whereabouts of the student.

Methodology

The setting for this mixed methods study was a predominantly White urban high school and a predominantly African American urban high school. The collection of the data was completed in one semester during the typical public school year. The data analysis and written findings were completed within six months after the conclusion of data collection. The data from the four areas, individual interviews, and focus group were analyzed as each set of data were collected and until the end of the research period. An interview was completed during the semester with one administrator from each school district. The administrators had an individual interview in November or December. After the individual interviews were completed, the focus group occur in January/February.

First, there was a collection of data in the following selected areas: 1) teacher quality, 2) AP enrollment and completion data, 3) technology usage, and 4) graduation rates. This was followed by analyzing the data to develop the questions for the two individual, semi-structured interviews. Next, there was a selection of one administrator from each urban school district with experience in the four areas. After the selection of participants, the recorded semi-structured interview was conducted with each administrators for an average of fifty to sixty minutes. The purpose of the interviews was to obtain educational background information on each participant, their understanding of the state accountability system, perceptions of the graduation rate, AP courses and

enrollment, access to technology, and teacher quality in secondary high schools. After each semi-structured interview was completed, data were reviewed by memoing and noting themes. Memoing was the writing of a document that tracks any ideas the researcher comes up with when reading notes and interviews (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2011). Lastly, a month after the semi-structured interview of the second administrator, a focus group was conducted that consisted of the school administrators. The recorded focus group was conducted in two hours. The focus group did not solely include questions and answers, but included the interaction between the participants and their points of view (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2011). Also, in the focus group, findings from the individual interviews were discussed.

After the completion of the interviews and focus group, the audio recorded interviews were transcribed. The “transcription process is transferring oral words to written words” (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2011, p. 303). Furthermore, “transcription will allow me the opportunity to be actively involved with my research from the beginning of the data collection” (p. 304). The researcher reviewed the transcription of all interviews verifying common and recurring themes and drawing conclusions. The themes that continuously occurred throughout the analysis were validated by trustworthiness. The trustworthiness measures included credibility, transferability, confirmability, and dependability (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2011). Data analysis was ongoing and completed with six months.

Conclusion

At the completion of this study, this exploratory study helped explain how the areas of graduation rate, teacher quality, access to technology, and AP enrollment aligned

(or not align) with the state accountability grade of each school. In addition, the discussion included the importance of comparing an urban White high school to an urban African American high school, and the perceptions developed based on data shared with the public. In addition, I determined whether qualitative data with quantitative data can provide sufficient information about the perceptions of the two different high schools based on the data collected in the four areas and the state accountability grade. The information obtained from the study may be essential for urban school districts and states as it may either validate state accountability systems or problematize them. In my estimation, whatever answers this exploratory research provided, it is critically important to understand whether state accountability systems well represent the successes of an urban school.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter serves as a review of literature on the history of educational accountability in public schools, the federal law of No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB), and Indiana's compliance with NCLB. In this review, the essential components of the federal law and Indiana state law that determine the accountability system for Indiana schools will be highlighted. The definition and characterization of an urban school district or school will be explained. In addition, literature on the interpretation of assessment data of students that are used in the academic accountability of schools will be reviewed. Finally, the areas of teacher quality, AP courses, technology in schools, and graduate rates of students from urban schools that can determine how schools are rated in an accountability system will be reviewed.

History of Accountability in Education

Stoskopf (1999) wrote that during the 1920s and 1930s educational assessments were developed to assess African Americans intellectual abilities for the workforce. According to Stoskopf, Lewis Terman was a White educational researcher from Stanford University who developed the IQ tests. The assessments were designed to determine the intellect of African American students in schools in order to develop various types of educational programs needed for future jobs. As African Americans intellectual abilities became publicly known, White people developed fears of African Americans' intellectual abilities; therefore, the Immigration Restriction Act of 1924 was voted on, maintaining racial impurities in the United States. For this purpose, the Immigration Restriction Act set extreme quotas based on a person's race and nationality. The Act favored people of western and northern European origin. In the 1920s, the Immigration Restriction Act

caused a division of students in schools based on IQ tests. In addition to the tests being used to track African American students, students with special needs were tracked in schools. According to Stoskopf, “Terman and other educational psychologists convinced many school districts to use high-stakes and culturally-based tests to place slow students into special classes, rigid academic tracks, or entirely separate schools” (p. 36). Consequently, this led to decades of high-stakes testing in United States schools.

The introduction of high-stakes testing was preceded by decades of earlier attempts to improve education in the United States (Minarechova, 2012). High-stakes testing led to the adoption of an education law for elementary and secondary schools, called the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 (ESEA), which consisted of the subsequent development and introduction of minimum qualification tests for students. The minimum qualification tests were math, reading, and writing. During the introduction of minimum qualification tests, there was almost no impact found, positive or negative, from the teachers’ instruction on the schools’ academic improvement. Interestingly, these assessments have been criticized “for being relatively easy to pass since they were concerned with only minimum requirements to be learned of the achievement floor and not the achievement ceiling” (Nichols & Berliner, 2007, p. 4). Consequently, ESEA had an unquantifiable impact on the expansion of standardized testing in United States schools (Duncan & Stevens, 2011; Sacks, 1999). However, with the expansion of standardized testing, the United States needed a national standardized test to measure what students could do. The National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) was the test that was subsequently created to provide this information on students beyond the minimum qualifications.

In 1969, NAEP was launched and represented a major step towards national assessment (Grant, 2004), especially since this assessment was the first to assess students on science. The NAEP was a mandatory assessment designed to measure what students knew and could do. The testing was conducted periodically in reading, mathematics, science, writing, social studies, civics, United States history, geography, citizenship, literature, music, career development, art, and computer competence (Johnson, 1992). Students in 4th, 8th and 12th grade were randomly selected to participate in NAEP. Since 1969, NAEP has been the sole, ongoing national indicator of what students in the United States know and what they can do in major academic subjects (Grant, 2004). With the continuation of NAEP being used as a national test, the National Assessment Governing Board was established for the purpose of setting the policy for NAEP. The Governing Board selects the subject areas to be assessed, develops assessment objectives and specifications, and determines appropriate student achievement levels as a congressional responsibility. In comparison to an IQ test, the NAEP selection of subject areas assessment revealed significant national limitations teaching and learning in the classroom compared to foreign countries. As a result of the information, the United States needed to review and develop a more rigorous law to address the education law.

The U.S. limitations in teaching and learning over the next twenty years was published in a report from the Presidential Office in 1983 and was titled, *A Nation at Risk* (Minarechova, 2012). The *A Nation at Risk* report pushed the topic of quality education onto the national political agenda, as it suggested that United States education was of lesser quality than education in other countries. The report implied that foreign competition had overtaken United States' economic superiority, since schools in other

countries produced better and more educated workers than did United States schools. Accordingly, the results from standardized tests were argued to be an indication of the true status of national education (Duncan & Stevens, 2011). For that reason, a “test boom” resulted, and state governors began testing all students with the aim of improving the economy (Duncan & Stevens, 2011; Fiske 2008). Thus, based on the NAEP assessment results, educational experts were directed to develop a plan to improve the United States education accountability system.

The National Education Summit in Charlottesville, Virginia, was held in September, 1989, with a focus on how to improve the United States educational performance compared to foreign countries (Minarechova, 2012). The result of this summit was a renewed federal commitment to improving educational achievement and increasing the nation’s commitment to students, teachers, and schools through the passage of No Child Left Behind (NCLB), signed by President George W. Bush in 2002. Some of the data, according to NCLB (2001), indicated that nearly 70% of inner city fourth graders were unable to read at the basic level and that high school seniors in the United States trailed Cyprus and South Africa in mathematics (NCLB, 2001). In addition, “a third of freshman in college will enroll in remedial courses before beginning college level courses” (NCLB, 2001, p.1). Based on the data, NCLB focused on three main aspects: flexible and local control, consolidation of parental control, and a focus on the operation of the system (Lobascher, 2011; United States Department of Education, 2007). As part of the main four aspects of NCLB, there was a legal requirement of annual testing of students. This was the first time in United States history that children were tested in all public schools and the results were used as an accountability component (Duncan &

Stevens, 2011; Matthews, 2006). Ironically, the tests were referred to as “high-stakes” because they had the ability to change the academic courses students could be enrolled in as a result of the implications associated with progress in test scores (Duncan & Stevens 2011). For example, students’ scores on the “high-stakes” test could determine if they were placed in remediation, general, honor, or AP courses. All schools were expected to address how to close the academic achievement gap for all students based on test results. Furthermore, NCLB (2001) consisted of requirements all states had to develop for schools to adhere to for academic accountability for all students.

Federal Requirements of NCLB

According to the United States Department of Education (2001), the NCLB (2001) provided the states’ schools with guidance to establish annual assessments, demand progress, improve poorly performing schools, create consequences for failure, and protect home and private schooling. In addition, the “Reading First” initiative gave states funding to promote literacy through comprehensive research-based programs. Under provisions of the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (Public Law 107–110), Congress authorized the continuance of its mandate for determining the content and format of NAEP assessments. While NCLB required NAEP to assess reading and mathematics every two years in 4th and 8th grade, the legislation permitted the assessment of other subjects such as science, writing, United States history, civics, geography, and other areas to the extent time and resources were available (NCLB, 2001). In the area of closing the academic gap, the NCLB policy included that states must develop a system of sanctions and rewards to hold districts and schools accountable for improving academic achievement for students. As part of the accountability requirements, states were required

to have an annual assessment in math and E/LA in grades 3-10, but each state may select or design assessments of their choosing. In addition, the states had to provide a plan on how to improve literacy in early grades. In sum, the NCLB (2001) was designed to ensure all students were academically growing, and schools were held accountable for academic growth or lack thereof for students.

NCLB was enacted to ensure educational accountability (Oluwole & Green, 2009). Any states receiving federal funds, such as Title I funds were required to implement an accountability system based on the state standards and summative assessments. Furthermore, states and school districts had to disaggregate data on a yearly basis on several categories including math, reading, and language arts for 3rd through 8th grade (Oluwole & Green, 2009). Some of the categories included ethnic groups, socioeconomic status, students with disabilities, gender, and English Language Learners (ELL). According to Duncan and Stevens (2011), based on the overall performance of the students in each grade level and core testing areas, schools were placed in a performance category marked by grades A-F. The definition of performance of students is scoring the minimum points set by the state that indicates mastery of the subject on a standardized test. The results of the standardized tests were an indication of the true performance status of students in the United States (Duncan & Stevens, 2011). The status of the United States' nation education is the overall average of mastery level of students in grades 3-10 in tested subject areas. If any school performs below the minimum requirement, sanctions were placed on the school to support improvement areas.

According to Oluwole and Green (2009) "Under the NCLB's accountability system, districts failing to make adequate yearly progress (AYP) on state assessments

were subject to sanctions under the Act, including State takeover of the district” (p. 3). When a school performed below the minimum requirements, it could receive Title 1 funding to help with academic performance. For this purpose, the concept of AYP under Title I included an emphasis on accountability of schools and school districts receiving Title I funds rather than emphasizing the Title I program itself or even the yearly performance gains of participating children. AYP is defined by a State as the amount of yearly improvement each Title I school and district is expected to make in order to enable low-achieving children to meet high performance levels expected of all children (United States Department of Education, 2009). Each state’s definition of adequate progress must be based primarily on its final assessment system included in the state’s corrective plan.

Corrective Action

States must develop a corrective action plan for schools that fail to educate disadvantaged students. In the NCLB Act of 2001, the first corrective action is schools and districts that have not made adequate yearly progress for one academic year will be identified by the district or state as needing improvement. The second corrective action plan is that districts failing to make AYP for two consecutive years must be identified at the performance category as improvement and develop a needs improvement plan (Oluwole & Green, 2009). Furthermore, “districts not making AYP for four consecutive years are identified for corrective action” (pg. 5). As a result, the state must take at least one corrective action under NCLB to address the failure of the district to make AYP. By a third corrective action, districts are to replace personnel that had a connection to the failure of the district, and appoint a new trustee through the state department of education

to manage the district's affairs or restructure and dissolve the school district (No Child Left Behind, 2001).

Disadvantaged students are defined as lacking in the basic resources or conditions believed to be necessary for an equal position in society (Merriam-Webster, 2017).

Another supporting definition of disadvantaged students is students whose family, social, or economic circumstances hinder their ability to learn at school (RAND, 1994).

According to NCLB, “schools would receive assistance to improve the academic performance of students, if the school continues not improving academically, the school district can use Title I funds to transfer to a higher-performing public or private school, or receive supplemental educational services from a provider of choice” (No Child Left Behind, 2001, p.14). The NCLB caused states to develop a state bill to comply with the federal law to prevent federal sanctions on the state and schools. Along with developing a corrective action plan, the states must develop a reward system for schools that have made progress in closing academic gaps. The reward will be “honored from a school bonus fund and an Achievement in Education state bonus fund” (p. 14). All states have to develop rewards and corrective action plans and regulations for school accountability per NCLB. Indiana is a state that has been in compliance with NCLB. Indiana has each area of accountability written for all school districts to address students’ academic performance.

State of Indiana

The state of Indiana implemented statewide testing in 1987 to measure student achievement of core subjects. According to an article written by the Indiana Senate Democrats (INSENDEMS) in 2015, the assessments were administered annually to third

through eighth graders in English and mathematics. The length of time for the assessments for students varied from twenty to sixty-five minutes. In 1999, the Indiana General Assembly established a performance accountability system based on student performance called Indiana Statewide Testing for Educational Progress (ISTEP) (Indiana Senate Democrats, 2015). A school's overall performance on the ISTEP determined the progress category the school was placed in, such as academic probation to exemplary progress. In 2010, the State Board of Education adopted the Common Core standards and in 2011, the Indiana State Board of Education changed to an A-F accountability system.

The A-F accountability system is letter grades assigned to elementary and middle schools based on English/Language Arts and mathematics percentage scores of students that passed the mandatory statewide annual assessment and participation rate. The specific accountability areas for K-8 schools are participation, performance of the students in the top 75%, and the performance of students in the bottom 25% (Indiana Administrative Code, 2015). The number of students who are enrolled in the school and the number of students who took the assessment determines a participation rate. The final scores for English/Language Arts and mathematics are weighted equally to determine the final overall grade. The letter grades are determined for high schools by establishing the English/Language Arts score and mathematics score based on the percentage of students that passed the mandatory statewide annual assessment. The number of students who are enrolled in the school and took the assessment determines a participation rate. In high school, the categories are graduation rate, college and career readiness, percentage of students passing the graduation examine for the first time compared to the 8th grade passing scores. The final score for English/Language Arts and mathematics are then

weighted to determine the final performance and improvement points. Additional categories are a high school's four-year graduation rate, the percentage of a high school's students who have college and career readiness courses, percentage of graduates who passed an Advanced Placement exam, percentage of graduates who passed an International Baccalaureate exam, and percentage of graduates who received dual college credit or an industry certification. The performance points of graduation rate and college and career readiness are then weighted to determine the final overall grade. The Indiana A-F accountability model revealed that not all Indiana schools had the same access to curriculum to meet the categories in the model. Therefore, Indiana needed to include common standards to make sure all schools were teaching students the same standards and providing access to curriculum. In 2013, House Bill 1427 was passed in session to pause the implementation of Common Core standards in schools.

The passage of House Bill 1427 allowed for a review of the academic standards of Common Core. A year later, in 2014, Indiana decided not to implement the Common Core standards, but modified common standards for Indiana students. Therefore, school districts needed to determine what standards were to be taught in schools based on Indiana standards and what standards would be assessed on the state test. In addition, in 2014, the new Superintendent of Public Instruction modified the A-F accountability model. By April 2014, the Indiana State Board of Education approved the College and Career Ready Standards. This still left school districts to develop curriculum maps and purchase materials in a short amount of time with the expectation of the new standards being taught in schools in the same year. In addition, with the new standards in the Fall of 2014, there was a new assessment in Spring 2015 on the College and Career Ready

standards (Indiana Senate Democrats, 2015). The third through eighth grade new test consisted of new standards and high schools had to administer two different tests to students based on their cohort year. As the new ISTEP+ was administered in Spring 2015, the length of time was noted as longer than previous state assessments. This new assessment determined the academic performance categories schools were placed in the A-F model.

The state of Indiana compliance with NCLB and continued interventions within failing schools led to the development of HB 1638. HB 1638 provides additional guidance for schools in Indiana to be placed in categories of A-F grades based on the overall student performance in particular areas and included in transformation zones. Transformation zones consist of schools that are placed in the lowest two categories, which are D and F. House Bill 1638 was originally about “transformation zones,” but it was rewritten to speed up the timeline by which a failing school can be taken over by the state if the school receives an F consecutively for four years (Indiana House Bill, 2015). The placement of schools in the A-F model in Indiana is primarily based on a standardized state test. This standardized test requires educators to have a clear understanding of what is being measured of students.

Assessment Measurement

A standardized test is “any examination that is administered and scored in a predetermined, standards manner” (Popham, 1999, p. 8). Additional research literature defines a standardized test as any form of test that requires all test takers to answer the same questions and is scored in a standard manner that makes it possible to compare the performance of individuals or groups of students. One type of standardized assessment is

an achievement test. The achievement test measures the knowledge and skills students learn in school or to determine the academic progress they have made over a period of time (Edglossary.org, 2015). Two types of achievement test are summative and formative. Summative tests can be used to identify topics and skills that students have mastered or need to development (Russell, 2010). An example of a summative achievement test is Indiana ISTEP or NAEP. Another type of assessment is formative, which collects and analyze information about student's knowledge and understanding prior and during instruction. A second type of standardized test is aptitude. An aptitude test predicts a student's ability to succeed in an educational setting (Edglossary.org, 2015). One example of an aptitude test is the Cognitive Ability Test. According to Popham (1999), standardized achievement tests need to accomplish their measurement mission with a smaller collection of test items within the test time that is allowed for students. This leads to not assessing students' knowledge and skills in the content area, but comparing them to their peers' ability level. This makes the goal of developing a test that captures student's skills and knowledge of a subject area difficult for test developers.

The first goal of the assessment developers of standardized test is "to create instruments that with a handful of items, yields valid norm-referenced interpretations of a student's status regarding chunking of content" (Popham, 1999, p. 9). Norm-referenced interpretation is scores indicating how an individual compares with other individual scores. Standardized achievement tests should be used for comparison and interpretation of students nationally in a content area. On average, fifty percent of a student population can answer correctly the items selected versus one hundred percent which leads to discriminating among students. Popham writes that standardized achievement tests

supply evidence needed to make norm-referenced interpretations of students' knowledge and skills in relation to those students nationally. Another goal is for assessment developers to create a tool that allows someone to make valid inferences about knowledge and/or skills that person has within particular content areas possess (Popham, 1999). The creation of these assessment tools has provided relative nationwide comparison data of students' content area mastery. Furthermore, the inference should be norm-referenced so students' knowledge or skills are comparable nationally to other students of the same grade and age. There are two types of inferences educators can gain from testing results.

The first is the inference of students' strengths and weaknesses across subject areas. It identifies students' relative strengths and weaknesses within a given subject area with sufficient numbers of test items (Popham, 1999). According to Popham, there should be a sufficient number of test items on assessments to allow meaningful within-subject comparisons of students' strengths and weaknesses. The second inference of student's strengths and weaknesses is based on standardized achievement tests and a student's growth over time in different content areas. Standardized achievement test scores should be regarded as rough approximations of a student's status regarding the content domain represented by the test. With this useful information on students' knowledge and skills in a content area, standardized achievement tests should not be used to evaluate the quality of education due to external factors.

Popham (1999) writes standardized achievement tests should not be used to judge the quality of education, because students' scores on a test do not provide an accurate index of educational effectiveness, "Any inference about educational quality made on the

basis of a student's standardized achievement test performance is apt to be invalid" (p.10). However, educators in the United States are being evaluated on the basis of their students' performances on tests that are created to produce comparative score interpretations rather than measuring instructional quality (Popham, 2014).

In addition, Popham (2014) writes teachers are responsible for teaching certain skills and bodies of knowledge that are measured by achievement tests. There is knowledge brought to schools that is not assessed on achievement tests, and that are of value to a student's academic development. Although educators have been urged to evaluate schools and teachers using student performances on educational tests, there is no meaningful evidence at hand indicating that these tests can distinguish between well-taught and poorly taught students. There are additional reasons not to use standardized achievement test to compare the quality of education in a school.

The first reason for not using standardized achievement tests is the different standards in the states, as well as within each state's local school districts. It is difficult for large testing companies to create assessments tailored for every state and local school districts. According to Popham (1999), "Test developers are obliged to create a series of one-size-fits-all assessments" (p.10). The test developers do their best to select test items that are likely to be taught in a content area, without regard to the state a student lives in. As a result, the tests do not address all the needs of states and local school districts to assess their students properly, or to obtain the most accurate information. Standardized achievement tests will always contain many items that are not aligned with what is emphasized instructionally in any particular educational setting. An example of this mismatch is the study in 1983 by Freeman and colleagues where they identified items on

five nationally standardized achievement tests in mathematics in grades fourth through sixth and reviewed the information in the textbooks the students used in schools. The researchers identified the items in the standardized achievement test that had not received meaningful instructional attention in the textbooks. In the research, it was also concluded that “50 to 80 percent of what was measured on the test was not suitably addressed in the students’ textbooks” (Freeman et al., 1983, p. 509). Freeman went on to state, “The proportion of topics presented on a standardized test that received more than cursory treatment in each textbook was never higher than fifty percent” (p. 509). Popham (1999) writes that mismatches like this, recognized or not, will often lead to spurious conclusions about effectiveness of education in a given setting if students’ scores on standardized achievement tests are used as an indicator of educational effectiveness.

The second reason standardized tests should not be used is due to the requirement that these tests permit meaningful comparison among students from only a small collection of test items (Popham, 1999). The test items that do the best job in spreading out students’ total-test scores are items that are answered correctly by half of the students. Test items that are answered correctly by a large number of students are not a suitable contribution to spreading out students’ test scores. Therefore, most of the test items on an assessment are “middle-difficulty” items (p. 11). Because of “middle-difficulty” items being selected for an assessment, items that students perform well on will often be excluded. This leads to the conclusion, items on which students perform well on are often taught by the teacher in the classroom. The more the teacher focuses on teaching those skills and knowledge to students the less likely those items will be on the standardized

achievement tests. It is not a good practice to use an assessment that deliberately avoids important content and skills that students are taught in school.

The third reason that student performance should not be used to evaluate the quality of education is that student performance on standardized achievement tests are heavily influenced by three causative factors. Popham (1999) writes that the three causation factors are what is taught in school, a student's native intellectual ability, and a student's out-of-school learning. First, what is taught in schools can vary from school to school, as well as within and outside the state. Students learn most of what they need about a subject in schools. The departments of education in different states use standardized achievement tests to arrive at inferences about the quality of instruction provided to students (Popham, 2014). According to Popham, there is no evidence to support the accuracy of such score-based inferences about instructional quality. Furthermore, there is no evidence that currently exists regarding "instructional sensitivity" (p. 49). In 1981, Haladyna and Roid described the role of instructional sensitivity when evaluating the values of accountability tests, "Instructional sensitivity is the degree to which student performances on a test accurately reflect the quality of instruction specifically provided to promote student mastery of what's being assessed" as cited in Popham, 2006, p.49. This definition is about a student's mastery based on the quality of instruction in the classroom. Instructional sensitivity is a continuous rather than a dichotomous variable (Popham, 2014). The student's ability to understand the instruction provided by the teachers depends on native intellectual ability.

Additionally, student performance should not be used to evaluate the quality of education because every student's native intellectual ability is different. A child born

with less aptitude for dealing with quantitative or verbal tasks might possess greater interpersonal or intrapersonal intelligence, but these latter abilities are not tested by standardized achievement assessments (Popham, 1999). The interpersonal or intrapersonal intelligence may cause some difficulties for students in how they are able to demonstrate their understanding of a concept, due to how concepts are assessed. Some items on standardized achievement tests are aimed directly at measuring intellectual ability.

The last reason that student performance should not be used to evaluate the quality of education is that most items on standardized achievement tests assess environmental experiences learned outside of school. If students come from economically advantaged families and environments, then they are more likely to succeed on standardized achievement tests than children from economically disadvantage families and environments (Popham, 1999). For example, an elementary student is given a writing prompt on what would you want in your neighborhood park and why. A student who lives in a poor neighborhood that lack access to parks, or is unable to go to a park will write a different response than a student who has a neighborhood park that is accessible or frequently visits a park. In recent research, it has been found that a student's socioeconomic status is highly correlated with standardized test scores, as many test items focus on assessing knowledge or skills learned outside of schools. Students of low economic status tend to live in urban school districts. Urban school districts are viewed as poor; consist of students of color, and typically have low academic performance in schools.

Urban Community

An urban area is defined as very developed with a density of human structures, such as houses, commercial buildings, roads, bridges, and railways (National Geographic, 2017). In addition, an urban is often defined as students of color and students from low-income families in densely populated areas that primarily attend urban schools (Buddin & Zamarro, 2009). In the education field, the word “urban” takes on many meanings as well. Milner (2012) best defines urban schools in three concepts. The concepts are urban intensive, urban emergent, and urban characteristic. Urban intensive is descriptive of schools that are in highly concentrated metropolitan cities with an average of one million plus people in an area. Urban intensive infrastructure can make it difficult to provide necessary and adequate resources to a large number of people. An example is the outside school factors of housing, poverty, and transportation that can affect schools. These factors can directly influence the academic performance of students in the classroom. The second concept is urban emergent, which describes schools located in an area fewer than one million people, where there is some scarcity of resource problems. In addition, there are outside factors such as limited resources, lack of qualified teachers, and low academic performances of students. The third concept is urban characteristic, and it is schools located in mid-sized cities that start to experience some the challenges associated with intensive and urban emergent. An example could be an increase in English Language Learners in the schools located in rural and suburban areas. In addition to the concepts Milner uses to help define urban schools, urban schools are often described in positive and negative ways by the media, politicians, parents, and educators.

However, the descriptions of urban schools have changed over the last 10 years due to the diverse student population. The largest change is more families of color living in urban school districts than White students. Significant research includes information on the description of urban schools in the United States (Patterson, Hale, & Stessman, 2007). Much of the research provides some common description of urban schools, communities, and students. Some of the common descriptions are about the socioeconomic status, racial make-up of the community, and teachers' perceptions of urban students. The first descriptive factor of an urban community is the combination of an increase of people of color in the urban communities and an increase in White flight. White flight occurs when White middle-class families and businesses relocate from urban centers to middle-class subdivisions and suburbs. In research by Patterson, Hale, and Stessman (2007), many White middle-class urban neighborhoods are occupied by the working-class, low-income, and people of color neighborhoods. Despite these changes in the urban neighborhoods, the faculty and staff of K-12 schools remain mostly White and middle-class. However, based on recent research, teachers prefer to work near their home, so they live in suburbs or wealthier urban communities, which is at odds with whom they may teach in urban schools (Buddin & Zamarro, 2009).

The second main description of urban schools is that many urban schools tend to be located in high poverty areas, with high-poverty areas defined as areas with a poverty rate of 20 percent or more. In addition, high-poverty areas are often identified because over half of the poor population in the county is from a minority group or over half of the poor population is non-Hispanic White, but it is the high poverty rate of a minority group that pushes the county's poverty rate over 20 percent (USlegal.com, 2017). Moreover,

urban schools have disproportionate numbers of low-income and at-risk students (Buddin & Zamarro, 2009). These high poverty schools disproportionate numbers compose 40% of elementary schools and 40% of secondary schools (Olivares-Cuhat, 2011). In addition, schools and neighborhoods considered “high poverty,” as well as the students within them, are geographically segregated from affluent school districts (Buddin & Zamarro, 2009). With this separation based on race and income, White students and students of color will not perceive the world in the same manner (Talbert-Johnson, 2006).

A third major description of urban schools is poor academic proficiency of students. The academic proficiency contributing factors are low student achievement, inadequate school readiness, low parental involvement, poor access to learning resources, lack of discipline, language barriers, and poor student health (Thompson et al., 2005), which is supported by the fact that White student teacher candidates believe these descriptions prior to their field experience (Hill, Friedland, & Phelps, 2012). Similarly, Hill and colleagues’ study described that teacher candidates revealed in their journals their thoughts about urban students lacking motivation and initiative and about students with learning disabilities struggling to learn in class. The student teachers’ journals confirm their fears of interactions with urban African American students based on their previous misconceptions.

In conclusion, the three major descriptions of urban areas leads one to believe that it is likely that White people are fleeing because of people of color are moving into their neighborhoods, that all urban areas are high in poverty, and that children who attend school in urban schools do not care about school. All of these paint a negative picture of living in urban areas with people of color, the lack of economic development, and low-

performing schools. In addition, as mentioned earlier, since many teachers who work in urban schools do not live in the urban communities, one would have to wonder if a teacher not living in an urban community develops teacher qualities that can be contradictory to the qualities needed for educating urban students.

Teacher Quality

The aptitude that teachers' display within content knowledge, ability to work with students with diverse needs, intangible skills, disposition, social structures, perception of students of color, and teacher preparation program can establish the quality of a teacher. There is significant research on teaching qualities and qualifications of teachers in urban, high poverty urban schools compared to low poverty urban schools. According to Talbert-Johnson (2006), NCLB narrows the public focus on effective teaching, specifically to knowledge content. There is no recent evidence that the federal government is holding states accountable for ensuring that highly qualified teachers are educating low-income diverse student populations based on NCLB. Unfortunately, NCLB has not provided adequate preparation for future teachers with appropriate experiences to address diversity issues at all educational and economics levels.

With the lack of guidance for teacher quality from NCLB, some teacher preparation programs have failed to prepare teachers to address the needs of an increasingly diverse population of urban students in order to close achievement gaps as well as other educational outcomes (Talbert-Johnson, 2006). Research has provided information that White middle class female teachers struggle to educate a culturally diverse student body because the clash of culture and language barriers within the classroom (Delpit, 2006). In addition, Hill, Friedland, and Phelps (2012) indicated that

most effective teacher candidates viewed diversity as a personal and professional learning opportunity, where as those who were less effective saw it as an obstacle and a scapegoat for their own inadequacies. The lack of teacher preparation program experiences in diverse learning environments can influence highly qualified teachers to lack the desire to educate students of color and low economic status students.

The poor and students of color get less than their fair share of high-quality teachers in urban school districts. Peske and Haycock (2006) found large discrepancies in the qualifications of teachers in diverse and high poverty schools versus teachers serving in schools with few students of color and students from low-income backgrounds. However, low-income students and students of color have higher performance gains with higher teacher quality (Peske & Haycock, 2006). In addition, Priestly, White, and Gong (2005) found that both high numbers of students of color and high poverty schools continue to exhibit stronger school performance when they have teachers of high quality. In contrast, the school performance is not as strong in schools with high numbers of students of color and high numbers of students from low-income backgrounds with low teacher quality. Many scholars have noted how teachers' qualities are related to school performance even after considering demographics (Priestly, White, & Gong, 2005). Furthermore, teachers who are highly qualified are disproportionately distributed to schools with low numbers of students from low-income backgrounds and low numbers of students of color (Peske & Haycock, 2006). Therefore, school districts with high numbers of poor and students of color are likely to demonstrate stronger school academic performance outcomes when students have high quality teachers' distributed evenly throughout their schools. Unfortunately, students in high poverty areas and in schools

with high numbers of students of color are disproportionately assigned teachers who are new to the profession and some not of high quality.

The new teachers who have been in the profession with less than three years, and who maintain high skills will have an impact on student achievement. Yet, high quality teachers tend to be distributed among low numbers of students of color and low-poverty schools. This leads to urban school districts in low-income neighborhoods employing teachers with low qualifications and weak academic credentials (Buddin & Zamarro, 2009). Peske and Haycock (2006) indicated that high-poverty secondary schools would have more than one in three core academic classes taught by out-of-field teachers. A teacher out-of-field is in transition to become licensed to teach in a particular area, but has a bachelor's degree in a non-education field. In fact, in order to determine teacher quality Presley, White, and Gong (2005), used ACT composite and English scores, teachers who failed the Basic Skills test on their first attempt, teachers with emergency or provisional certification, teachers' undergraduate college competitiveness ranking, and the percent of teachers with three or fewer years of experience to rank teachers. One result of their study found students of color who attended high poverty secondary schools tended to have one high quality teacher that earned a degree in a specific content area (Priestly, White, & Gong, 2005).

Unfortunately, teachers who were ranked at the bottom of Presley, Bradford and Gong's (2006) study with low teachers' qualities were distributed more heavily in schools with a high number of students of color and high-poverty schools. These schools continue to improve in student academic performance when they have some high quality teachers. In fact, Peske and Haycock (2006) listed several indicators that impacted

teacher distribution on student performance. The first indicator was teachers' academic skills and knowledge of the subject could affect student growth. Two reviews of the research on teacher quality concluded that teachers' level of literacy accounted for the variance in student performance. The second indicator was the mastery of content by teachers affects students' gain of knowledge, especially in math and science. Teachers need to have a strong foundation of the academic content expected to teach students. Third, teachers gaining experience in their first three or four years of teaching, students' performances increased in the academic content area and building student-teacher relationships were developing. Teachers who had some type of relationship with students could influence the academic performance of those students in the classrooms. The last indicator was the teachers' pedagogical skills in relationship building with students. Despite the indicators mentioned from Peske and Haycock research, the focus of NCLB was to increase student performance. The fact that NCLB focuses on the content knowledge and skills of teachers leads to limited research on the intangibles in schools such as care for students, efficacy, enthusiasm, and affirmation for all students (Talbert-Johnson, 2006). It is important for teachers to have the content knowledge, but in an urban district, teachers must be compassionate and effective in the classroom. Talbert-Johnson writes that effective teachers have intangible qualities or dispositions that are difficult to define and even more difficult to assess.

The dispositions of teachers can affect student learning, student motivation, and student development (Ford & Quinn, 2010). Dispositions are guided by beliefs and attitudes related to values such as caring, fairness, and social justice. These intangible qualities are driven by a specific belief system. Ford and Quinn described how the

personal belief system of teachers influences the behaviors displayed in the classroom and in instructional decisions. Teachers' belief systems and their cultures that are brought into classrooms can influence their perceptions of urban students' academic abilities. Talbert-Johnson (2011) wrote that when teachers and students are out-of-sync the inevitable occurs: miscommunication; confrontation between students, the teacher, and the home; hostility; alienation; diminished self-esteem, and school failure. In order for teachers and students to be in-sync, teachers must understand the social structures that shape students of color and low economic status students.

According to Grant and Gillette (2006), effective teachers take into account that academics and social achievements do not occur in a vacuum and are affected by various societal structures. "Social structure is the system of socioeconomic stratification, class-structure, social institutions, or, other patterned relations between large social groups" (Talbert-Johnson, 2006, p.153). These societal structures could have an impact on the educational system that maintains or increases the achievement gaps between class, race, and gender. According to Talbert-Johnson, "It is imperative for teachers to know their students well and believe that all students can learn and achieve high levels of academic success" (2006, p.153). One of the societal structures suggest that teachers are more likely to hold positive attitudes towards students who are culturally and ethnically like themselves (Ford & Quinn, 2010). Students of color tend to have higher academic, personal, and social performance when taught by teachers from their own ethnic group. As a result, students may not be adequately prepared and may have limited opportunities for advanced education because teachers focus more on a student's race or ethnicity than in their academic ability.

A second societal structure is teachers categorized students by their race and ethnicity (Patterson, Hale, & Stesson, 2007). For example, the teachers assumed that some of the Black and Mexican students did not care about their grades:

Black students express that when Black students fail, the teachers assume all students are bad. It is not right how they criticize us and put us in categories. Some of us do care about our grades. We want to graduate and we want to make good grades, but teachers just do not make it fair enough for us to do that. (p. 5)

Another example is from Ford and Quinn (2010) who found that teachers show favoritism to White and higher income students, and these students receive more attention from the teachers. Again, students stated the teachers would only help the White students and would help the students with more money than a lower class student. Ford and Quinn (2010) further suggested that teachers judged students from higher socio-economic status more favorably than students of lower socio-economic status. This confirms how students are judged on their race, ethnicity, or economic status not their academic abilities in the classrooms.

The last societal structure is teachers base their decisions to educate students on their perceptions of students' behaviors rather than on their academic performances (Olivares-Cuhat, 2011). These limited perceptions have denied urban students learning opportunities. Teachers who do not ignore students because of their behavior, but care about their education have high expectations for urban students. Hill, Friedland, and Phelps (2012) write that White teacher candidates have stereotypical perceptions of urban schools such as feeling as if they are doing missionary work, culture blindness, and apprehension of educating students of color. They noted that caring teachers hold students to high expectations, provide support for urban students to be successful, and refuse to give up on them. If teachers are treating individuals as equally as possible,

without regard to race, culture, or ethnicity, the teacher is displaying colorblindness in the classroom. Ford and Quinn (2010) write White teachers are more likely to hold low expectations for students of color than for White students, and White Americans traditionally question the intelligence of students of color. Moreover, when White students are described as more intellectual, it creates limited access to AP courses for students of color and low economic status students.

AP Enrollment

Urban students tend to have difficulty with AP accessibility due to poor treatment by teachers, and gaps in skills for AP classes due to teachers' lack of desire to educate them well. Griffin and Allen (2006) wrote that urban schools lack rigorous courses because of the larger classes, outdated libraries, and minimum offerings of AP courses. Students attending schools that were well-resourced and offered rigorous curricula were mainly located in suburbs. According to Ohrt and Lambie (2009), educational programs that promoted equal access to higher education for traditionally underserved students do exist. For example, in Florida, the state collaborated with College Board in the 2000s to reduce the demographic disparities of enrollment in AP courses and college readiness. Additionally, Brak, Garnett, and Burley (2011) found that sixteen states offered monetary incentives to students to take the AP exams as a strategy to increase enrollment in AP courses and reduce testing fees. This research also identified financial resources, limited vision toward higher education, and unrealistic academic goals for schools. Conger, Long, and Iatarola (2009) wrote that many states have increased the number and rigor of courses that students are required to take and increased the offering of rigorous coursework with the reauthorization of NCLB. Regrettably, these programs have limited

space and do not address embedded systemic issues of education, which tend to continue the widening of demographic gaps in AP courses.

Unfortunately, Griffin and Allen (2006) found that African American students enrolled in a well-resourced, predominately White school faced discrimination and racism that they did not encounter at a school that was predominately students of color. Furthermore, students were taunted and White teachers viewed African American students as not as intelligent as their counterparts. Many students of color preferred to return to their poorer neighborhood schools. They also found that students who attended majority White schools and enrolled in AP courses were described as “athletes” rather than scholars throughout their education. Ohrt and Lambie (2009) wrote that Latinx and African American students often experienced oppressive practices inside and outside schools that prevented them from pursuing high-level courses. Those oppressive practices included retention, standardized testing, tracking, and discipline policies. Further, some oppressive practices consisted of school counselors having low expectations for African American students’ abilities and aspirations.

Another example of unfair treatment by school staff found by Griffin and Allen (2006), was a male student describing how his counselor had encouraged him to attend a junior college or seek employment rather than attend a four-year institution. In their research, it showed that schools with a majority African American student population did not offer ideal learning and college preparatory environments for students. According to College Board (2007), Latinx and African American students continued to be underrepresented in AP courses. Access to AP courses are an issue for all students and vital for students of color and students of lower SES because of the increased likelihood

of college retainment (Brak, Garnett, & Burley, 2011). College retainment means the ability for a college/university to continue with reenrolling students each year until the students graduate from the college. Research suggests that parent support for Latinx and African American students can be contentious for their academic success.

In recent literature, the demographic gap is the racial and gender make-up of students enrolled in AP courses. Students of all races are more likely to take an AP course if they attend a small school versus a large urban school. Small schools with students of low economic status offer a variety of AP courses and implement a program that incentivizes the teachers and students (Conger, Long, & Iatarola, 2009). Incentives are tangible or non-tangible rewards for enrolling in a course. An issue for the lack of students enrolled in AP courses is the presence of magnet programs that are academically themed and focused. Magnet schools affect racial groups differently. For example, African American students tend to experience a decrease in enrolling in AP courses because of within-school segregation between magnet program students and African American traditional students. African American students in magnet programs are twice as likely to enroll in AP courses. In traditional schools, high achieving African American students resist taking advanced courses because they disproportionately fear academic failure, the stigma of “acting White,” or being isolated in a majority White class. Brak, Garnett, and Burely (2001) also characterized similar barriers for African American students not enrolled in AP courses, such as being identified as “sellouts” among peers, a lack of encouragement from school personnel, and having lower academic scores. The academic successes of high achieving African American students has been attributed to

their personal resilience (Griffin & Allen, 2006) rather than from any sort of assistance from the school.

Resilience in education means the “heightened likelihood of success in school and in other aspects of life despite environmental adversities that are brought about by early traits, conditions, and experiences” (Wang, Haertel, & Wahlberg, 1995, p. 5). Resilient students are able to translate difficult environments into a source of motivation by maintaining high expectations and aspirations, being goal-oriented, having good problem-solving skills, and being socially competent. Additional barriers identified in the research are lack of awareness, resistance from school personnel, and feelings of isolation and intimidation from peers who have participated in previous higher course programs. African American and Latinx students are not more likely to take more advanced courses than their White classmates (Griffin & Allen, 2006). AP programs fail to adjust for students’ ability prior to entering into high school. For example, College Board (2007) reported that in 2007 only 14% of graduating seniors in public school were Black and only 7% of the seniors took an AP exam.

In addition, College Board (2007) research found that 33% of African American and Latinx students enrolled in AP courses. Students in magnet schools are 5.1 to 8.1 percentage points more likely than students in non-magnet schools to take AP courses (Conger, Long, & Iatarola, 2009). A gateway to an AP course maybe a magnet program in an urban school district. Magnet themed programs produce higher quality education that influences students to take AP courses. There is a higher rate of African American and Latinx students enrolled in advanced courses attending magnet programs. Conger, Long, and Iatarola (2009) wrote that students who attend magnet programs are more

likely to enroll in an AP courses. In recent research, non-poor students are three times more likely than poor students to take an AP math courses. Despite an increase in students of color enrolling in AP courses, there is still a gap between Whites and African Americans. This is evident in the research by Conger, Long, and Iatarola (2009) who wrote the gap between African American students and White students in AP math increased by 1.8 points. This continuous gap is not getting smaller but remaining in schools.

African American and Hispanic students are much more likely to be poor and earn lower eighth grade test scores than White students (Conger, Long, & Iatarola, 2009). According to Conger, Long, and Iatarola (2009), poverty correlates with lower eighth grade scores, higher limited English proficiency (LEP), and non-gifted exceptionality. Pre-high school academic performance can determine the options provided to students during their first year in high school. Students from a school with lower percentages of students of color and lower percentages of students receiving subsidized lunch are likely to have a high number of AP course offerings in school (Brak, Garnett, & Burley, 2011). When students have limited access to AP courses, they are less prepared for higher education and lack the additional skills of technology. Technology skills are a necessity for academic learning in United States schools. Students who are not enrolled in AP courses, high ability classes, magnet programs, or lack high quality teachers can have limited access to technology.

Technology Access

Technology has increased the use and application of students' learning and mastery of academic skills (Song & Owens, 2011). The International Society for

Technology in Education (ISTE) has written about the importance of technology as an essential part the teaching and learning processes. Technology provides students the opportunities to explore materials taught in the classroom more in depth:

In order for technology to have a major influence on the educational system, teachers and students must not only have access to technology, but access to technology in a contextual matter that is cultural relevant, responsive, and meaningful to their educational practice to promote quality teaching and active student learning. (p. 24)

Recent literature has analyzed the social cultural disparities in technology availability and the use of it in the classroom. A disparity is teachers and students from higher income families have been found to use technology in school and at home more than students from lower income families (Song & Owens, 2011). Teachers and students of color from urban schools and low-income backgrounds have experienced less access to computers compared to Whites from higher social economic status, rural and suburban schools. Urban schools of lower SES are only half as likely to have Internet access compared to schools of higher SES (American Council of Education, 2003). Moreover, African Americans and Latinx students who are poor and considered working class, lack access to information and technology resources (Owen & Song, 2011). Another disparity is the technology practices within the schools the students attend. For example, urban teachers will use technology for drill and practice. Pinar (2004) writes that technology tools are being used to drill and kill students into passing standardized tests, and not actually being integrated into the classroom instruction or practice. Furthermore, Pinar explains that current use of computer technology in urban schools turns students into disembodied and alienated learners that discourage students from authentic learning. Students are not experiencing technology in real life situations, but only in testing situations to determine their knowledge or mastery of a skill.

The lack of real life situations for students with technology in the classroom can be due to the teachers' skills with technology. Teachers of color in urban schools are twice as likely to possess inadequate technology and informational literacy, training skills, and knowledge to work technology in the classrooms (Owen, Song, & Kidd, 2007) unlike teachers in high suburban, rural, or urban SES schools. The first point is low and high SES schools' teachers use technology to augment regular academic activity, but not as an informational tool to assist in teaching and learning in the classrooms (Bauer, 2002,). Owens and Song (2011) indicated that young novice teachers in urban schools expressed a willingness to integrate technology more than veteran teachers. In addition, younger and less experienced teachers are more inclined to learn about how to use technology in urban classrooms. Furthermore, teachers in the urban school environment had the inability to acquire quality access to educational technology, which prevented them from exploring innovative uses. The last disparity is educational technology uses deals with the nature of technology adoption and organizational change. (p. 25)

For instance, research states that teachers are willing to adopt and implement learning technology for teaching and learning processes. Owen and Song (2011) suggest that teachers need to be adequately trained in urban schools to implement effective use of technology.

The second point is 83% of teachers indicated they had received basic computer training (Owen & Song, 2011). Less than half of the teachers received training on the use of technology in the classroom and follow-up training. Due to the lack of teacher training, most computers in the classrooms are used to create presentations. Additional data points

from this study found 80% of teachers used the computer for lesson plans, and only 7% used the multimedia in the classroom. Less than 10% of the teachers indicated they use the Internet more than once a week for downloading items and taking development courses. In the recent research, urban schools use technology mostly for communication purposes. Seventy-nine percent of teachers use the computer for administrative processes more than once a week; fifty-three percent of teachers use the Internet to communicate with colleagues.

The third point is a comparison of teacher training on computers and technology use across socioeconomic school levels (Owen & Song, 2011). Results suggest that 84% of teachers in high SES schools receive training in basic computer skills, compared to 78% of low SES school teachers. Secondly, 85.3% of middle SES school teachers receive basic computer skills training compared to 80% of low SES school teachers. The last data point is middle SES teachers received the highest percentage of training in integrating software in the curriculum compared to low and high SES school teachers.

The last important point made by Song and Owens (2011) is comparing teacher Internet and technology use in instruction across socioeconomic levels. First, teachers in middle SES schools had the highest use of computers for multimedia presentations with 80% compared to 76% for high SES teachers and 75% for low SES teachers. Teachers in low SES schools used about 58% of their time on the computer to create class presentations once a week. Fifteen percent of the teachers in low SES schools reported using a “www” website more than once a week, compared to 18% of high SES school teachers who used a similar website once a week. In addition, over 50% of teachers in low SES schools never accessed model lesson plans from the Internet compared to 47%

from middle SES schools and 46% from high SES schools. In addition, 60% of low SES teachers never used the computer given to them compared to 49% of high SES teachers. Lastly, 30% of teachers from high SES schools compared to 25% from low SES schools reported that they used the computer to communicate with students more than twice a week. The limited access to technology for urban teachers can limit their options to support students in developing technology skills to learn, master skills, and the opportunity to earn high school credits in a non-traditional way.

Graduation Rate

Descriptions of urban schools including high dropout rates and low graduation rates have unfortunately become the norm. This norm is derived from the “assumption that the dropout problem is due to the student and his or her family.... For many high school students, dropping out represents an act of disengagement from schools that began in elementary schools” (Patterson, Hale, & Stessman, 2007, p. 2). The attempt to turnaround youth disengagement in school was addressed in the reauthorization of NCLB for school districts to address graduation rates , especially in urban school districts. NCLB requires districts to annually prepare and disseminate local report cards with information that includes the graduation rates as part of state accountability. Under NCLB, school districts are also required to show annual yearly progress, as well as other indicators to determine if schools have met their goals.

A data source for graduation of urban schools is the Common Core of Data (CCD) that collects annual information from each state department of education. The CCD reports the number of students enrolled at each grade level and the number of students who earn a diploma. This data source has become more widely used because it is

the basis for estimates at the state, district, and school levels per the requirements of NCLB (Heckman & LaFountaine, 2010). Based on the CCD, the national graduation rate had rebounded in the 2000s compared to the decline in the 1990s. Heckman and LaFountaine (2010) found that post-schooling diplomas are more important for estimating students of color rates since enrollment in these programs are predominately students of color. Post-schooling diplomas are high school equivalency diplomas. Students who earn a required passing score on a high school exam in math and English.

A research study by Heilig (2011) included important information on cohort groups and tracking students as they progressed through an urban high school. In her research, she determined that African American and Latinx students showed the steepest loss between the 9th and 10th grades, which suggested that about half of the freshman class did not earn high school credits on time, as compared to 60% of White and Asian students who earned credits on time. In Heling's study, all student ethnic groups and cohorts showed a 10% rate of students not earning all their high school credits from grades 10 to 11 on time. Between the 11th and 12th grade, "all student groups and cohorts show an equal level progression trends with a grade to grade loss of less than 4%" (p. 27). On a positive note, African American and Latino students gained credits between the 11th and 12th grades. Student's ability to earn high school credits could be based on their mobility within and between school districts. If students move several times during a school year, high school credits may or may not be earned from a lack of attendance to complete the work. Heilig noted the mobility of students from middle school to high school and within high school years to be higher for White students. In Heling's research,

“Whites have the highest mobility rate of 4% compared African American students 3% mobility rate” (p. 28).

Another point Heilig (2011) mentioned was that when analyzing urban schools accountability of students’ progression to earning a high school diploma that students could be coded as disappearing from the district or not enrolled in the district. As a result, White students had the highest level of disappearing from the district while African Americans had the lowest level. Thus, African Americans and Latinx students are at the greatest risk of dropping out. This risk is higher during the third and fourth years of high school. Even African American and Latinx students who are not economically disadvantaged show similar risk as economically disadvantaged White and Asian students. Heling (2011) determined that NCLB had a positive impact on accountability of low-performing students and schools. There continues to be issues with how states calculate their graduation rates, and this can affect urban schools. A way school districts are attempting to have a grasp on students earning high school diplomas is through redesigning high school structures.

For example, Prairie High School in Kansas has additional programs to support the school’s changing student population to support students who failed courses or to assist students who dropped out of school to earn a high school diploma (Patterson, Hale, & Stessman, 2007). In this urban high school, there was a belief that small learning communities would increase the connection between teachers and students. Small learning communities are career academies, schools-within-a school, houses, or magnet schools:

Career academies organize curricula around one or more careers or occupations. Schools-within-a-school is multi-grade, separate,

autonomous individual subunits organized around a theme, each with its own personnel, budget, and program. House plans assign students within the high school to groups of a few hundred each across grades. Each house has its own discipline policies, student activity program, student government, and social activities. Magnet schools focus (e.g., math and science, or arts), recruit students from the entire district, and sometimes-select students meeting their selection criteria. (U.S. Department of Education, 2008)

Therefore, there would be an increase in students' academic performance and graduation from high school (Patterson, Hale, & Stesson, 2007). Unfortunately, public school structures and cultures tend to reflect White, middle-class values and assumptions.

Assumptions of Families of Color and Low-Economic Status Families

These teacher values and assumptions may not be the same as students of color and their families (Patterson, Hale, & Stesson, 2007). Cultural practices in schools for family involvement may not be viewed the same by all parents. For example, schools who have parent night expect parents to attend to receive information about their child. If parents do not attend the parent monthly meetings at the school, it is assumed the parents do not care about the child's education. A parent may not be able to attend meetings in the evening due to work or other personal reasons, but are very concerned about the child's education. Educators tend to engage in cultural practices that seem effective to them, but parents and students do not experience these cultural practices. Furthermore, this established that there are contradictions between parents, students, and schools.

Another assumption is that teachers value diversity in the schools, but speak of students through a deficit view. Deficit thinking refers to the belief that low-income or students of color do not perform well in school because of deficits or defects within the student or family (Garcia & Guerra, 2004). In addition, deficit thinking leads to describing urban students as being responsible for their lack of persistence in school. The

focus of deficit thinking emphasizes “the students’ inabilities rather than their abilities, and encourages policies and programs to view underserved students as less than their peers” (Green, 2006, p. 24). When teachers operate from a deficit perspective of urban students, they may not trust a student’s abilities to think critically and to arrive at the correct answer. Furthermore, the deficit model does not “provide students with the opportunities to think more critically, take risks, and problem solve without penalty” (p. 25). Also, “the teachers described students who dropped out as not motivated, not committed to school and not valuing education” (Patterson, Hale, & Stesson, 2007, p. 6). In addition, a teacher in Patterson, Hale, & Stesson’s (2007) research states the students did not show the passion “I wanted them to show.” This thinking further confirmed in the teacher’s mind that the students did not care and were not motivated to learn. According to Ford and Quinn (2010), White teachers who lacked exposure to African American culture were prone to negatively describe African American students as lackadaisical, violent, and unmotivated, “The students consciously decided not to do the work the student made the choice to fail a class” (Patterson, Hale, & Stesson, 2007, p. 7). Green (2006) noted that the deficit model encourages a self-fulfilling prophecy that nontraditional students will fail regardless of their skills or potential. Furthermore, teachers believed students did not have personal resources or family support that would contribute to their success in school. This is based on the 75% of the students who are on free and reduced lunch so parents are not involved in the children’s education. Due to the belief in some schools that parents of color and poor parents are not involved in their child’s education, this equated to they did not value education to educators. This description is not necessarily true because there is a range of value for education based on

a person's personal and familiar experiences. All parents of color and low economic status students have the hope that their children receive a good education, are well prepared for the workplace and college, and graduate from high school despite the negative perception Whites might have of them. As students of color and low economic status students cope with the perceptions and how they are described by the dominant culture, they must fight to break away from the box they are continuously put in.

Summary

There are several descriptions of urban schools, urban students, urban teachers, urban parents, and urban academic performance. The first description is the economic status of families in urban communities is low income. Low-income families tend to have limited resources to maintain basic needs for living not including educational needs. Due to the urban neighborhoods consisting of low-income families, White families and middle-income families tend to leave urban communities. When White families leave urban communities, it is called "White flight," because middle class families have the desire to maintain the level of neighborhood economic status. As White middle class families leave urban communities and move into "like" communities, urban communities will continue to be described as the place where poor and uneducated people of color live.

A description of urban schools includes a low number of high quality teachers. The student teachers of educational programs have perceptions of students of color that have been condition into them as the truth by the dominate culture that can cause negative experiences for the students more than the student teachers. Teachers tend to view students of color as discipline problems, academically low performers, and lacking

parental support. Furthermore, teachers in urban schools tend to lack knowledge of the content to teach students effectively. Those teachers who have strong foundational knowledge of the content tend to teach students in schools that have fewer students of color, and more students from middle to upper SES background. Teachers who are very knowledgeable of their content may lack intangible skills that are needed to work with urban students. Some of those intangible skills are caring, fairness, and social justice. The intangible skill of social justice helps teachers understand the social structure that students of color and low economic status students operate in during school. These intangible skills can be developed when students are becoming teachers in the urban schools. Student teachers who lack the experiences and exposure to students in urban schools may struggle to educate them. Deficit thinking regarding students of color and their academic abilities may occur if teachers lack the experience and exposure prior to teaching in an urban classroom. As a result, teachers may not focus on students' academic abilities, but the behavior of students. In addition, the students who are viewed as having behavior problems are not likely to be considered for AP courses.

Another description of urban schools is the lack of access for students of color to AP courses. There is still a significant difference in the number of students of color with access to AP courses compared to White students. Many students of color have limited access because urban schools do not offer the courses, or teachers lack the knowledge for the courses to be offered in their schools. Another reason students lack access to AP coursework is that teachers are not recommending students based on potential, but only on academic performance on state or national tests. There are academic gaps that students have in AP courses because the best teachers are not educating the students in the

neediest schools. When students of color are enrolled in AP courses, their experiences are not always positive because the teachers treat them as if they do not belong in advanced classes. Many teachers do not view urban students as being academically capable of completing the work of an AP courses. Students who enroll in magnet programs in elementary and middle school are more inclined to be recommended for AP courses in secondary schools. When students are enrolled in AP courses in secondary schools, they will have greater access to technology.

A fourth description of urban schools is the lack of technology in the schools, teacher training, and intentional computer science curriculum to educate students. Technology in urban schools is limited due to prioritizing the needs of the schools maintaining a good learning environment. Even with the school districts prioritizing how much technology access teachers and students have, many teachers lack the skillsets to integrate technology in the classrooms. Students who lack the access to technology lack the preparedness for the workforce or college because they have limited knowledge. As students use technology more in school for learning, it increases the avenues for students to use and stay engaged in school to earn a high school diploma.

The final description is the rate of urban students earning their diplomas has increased since NCLB. NCLB has forced states to be accountable for all students who should earn a high school diploma. In addition, states have to maintain data on the percentages of graduates and incorporate these percentages in their school accountability rate. Despite the low graduation rate of urban students, the students have the desire and motivation to learn and earn diplomas. Unfortunately, deficit thinking of the teachers does not help students in urban schools to be academically well prepared for college or

enter the workforce. The deficit thinking of counselors and teachers perpetuates negative stereotypes of students of color and students from low-income backgrounds. Research suggests common threads of deficit thinking among teachers, negative perceptions of urban students, and mediocre teachers for students in urban schools. Alongside all of the negative characterizations of urban students, there are contradictory data from students to communicate how they characterize themselves. The dominate characterization of urban students, communities, and schools can only be changed when a balance of research literature compares urban schools serving large populations of students of color, with urban schools serving large populations of White students in the areas of teacher quality, AP enrollment, technology access, and graduation rates.

CHAPTER THREE: METHODS

The purpose of this mixed-methods research is to explore the descriptive comparison of a majority White urban high school to a majority African American urban high school in four areas--teacher quality, advanced placement enrollment, technology access, and graduation rates-- in order to determine how these data align or do not align with the state letter grade of accountability. This research is important to determine if the letter grade assigned by the state department of education aligns with public perceptions of a good school. Mixed methods research is “research in which the researcher collects and analyze data, integrates the findings, and draw inferences using both qualitative and quantitative methods to answer questions in a single study” (Mertens, 2010, p. 293). In addition, this research “is a situated activity that locates the observer in the world and consists of a set of interpretive, material practices that make the world visible” (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005, p. 3). This study illustrates whether mixed methods research can provide sufficient information in the four areas to contradict or support the state accountability system and the perceptions of urban schools that are formed from the accountability system. Information from this research will be essential for urban communities, urban schools, and state educational accountability systems to understand whether state accountability system grades provide a reliable representation of the quality of urban schools.

Epistemology Framework

The epistemology for this research is grounded in the constructivist paradigm. The epistemology of this paradigm presumes “we can access reality through or by studying a variety of others’ perceptions” (Mertens, 2010, p. 19). Historically, the

constructivist approach is associated with the hermeneutics, which is about “seeking a deeper understanding by interpreting the meaning that interactions, and actions, and objects have for people” (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2011, p. 17). In addition, the constructivist as a critic of positivism attempts to understand and explain human and social reality (Mertens, 2010). Furthermore, the constructivist paradigm allows each person to construct his or her own reality.

The constructivist paradigm supports the research questions by providing an avenue to construct the meaning of the information gathered in the research process of data collection (Mertens, 2010). In addition, the paradigm provides the appropriate methods to collect empirical data in order to make meaning of the information for the research. Furthermore, the ontology of this paradigm assumes that reality exists and that it is constructed inter-subjectively through meanings and understanding developed socially in the environment. On the other hand, associated perceptions of reality provide practical information about the social world and our position within it.

This paradigm posits the researchers’ values are inherent in all steps of the research process except for truth. Truth negotiation is constructed through dialogue or interaction between researcher and participants and in reference to the data collected. The assumption of constructivist paradigm is that knowledge is socially constructed by people in the research process. Accordingly, researchers should try to understand the complex world of lived experiences from the point of view of those who live it (Schwandt, 2000).

Theoretical Framework

A “literature-based framework” was used that encompassed a definition of the word “urban” and state accountability assessments in education. The three concepts

Milner (2012) used to best define urban schools are “urban intensive,” “urban emergent,” and “urban characteristic.” Urban intensive defines schools that are in highly concentrated metropolitan cities with an average of one million plus people in an area, such as New York City, Los Angeles, and Chicago. In large cities, the urban intensive infrastructure can make it difficult to provide necessary and adequate resources to a large number of people. For example, the outside school factors of housing, poverty, and transportation can affect students attending K-12 schools. Also, the lack of resources in a city can directly influence the academic performance of students in the classroom. The second concept is urban emergent, which describes schools located in an area fewer than one million people, but where also there is some scarcity of resource problems (Milner, 2012). The final concept is urban characteristic, and these are schools located in mid-sized cities that have started to experience some the challenges associated with intensive and urban emergent (Milner, 2012). In addition to the concepts Milner uses to help define urban schools, these urban schools are described in positive and negative ways by the media, politicians, parents, and educators based mostly on academic performance on a state test (Milner, 2012).

The remaining part of the literature framework was presented in Chapter Two. However, this literature framework on the use of assessment in education was foregrounded by Popham’s highly important research. Popham (1999), who is one of the most respected statistical experts on accountability assessments, described two inferences that should be used to gain an understanding of assessments. Standardized achievement test scores can be regarded as rough approximations of a student’s knowledge status regarding the content domain represented by the test (Popham, 1999). However, even

with this useful information on students' knowledge and skills in a content area, standardized achievement tests should not be used to evaluate the quality of educations due to external factors. Although educators have been urged to evaluate schools and teachers using student performances on educational tests, there is no meaningful evidence indicating that these tests can distinguish between well-taught and poorly taught students (Pophan, 2014).

There are, though, additional reasons not to use standardized achievement tests to compare the quality of education in a school. One reason for not using standardized achievement tests is the different standards in the different states, as well within each state's local school districts. It is impossible for large testing companies to create assessments tailored individually for every state and local school districts. As a result, the "test developers are obliged to create a series of one-size-fits-all assessments" (Popham, 1999, p. 10). A second reason standardized tests should not be used is due to the requirement that these tests permit meaningful comparison among students from only a small collection of test items. In 1981, Haladyna and Roid described the role of instructional sensitivity when evaluating the values of accountability tests., "Instructional sensitivity is the degree to which student performances on a test accurately reflect the quality of instruction specifically provided to promote student mastery of what's being assessed" (as cited in Popham, 2006, p. 49). This definition is about a student's mastery based on the quality of instruction in the classroom, while the student's ability to understand the instruction provided by the teachers depends on native intellectual ability.

A third reason that student performance should not be used to evaluate the quality of education is that student performance on standardized achievement tests are heavily

influenced by three causative factors (Popham, 1999). These three causation factors are the curriculum that is taught in school, a student's native intellectual ability, and a student's out-of-school learning. Accordingly, one reason that student performance should not be used to evaluate the quality of education is every student's native intellectual ability is different. A child born with less aptitude for dealing with quantitative or verbal tasks might possess greater interpersonal or intrapersonal intelligence, but these latter abilities are not tested by standardized achievement assessments (Popham, 1999).

In addition, student performance on state accountability assessments should not be used to evaluate the quality of education because most items on standardized achievement tests assess environmental experiences learned outside of school. If students come from economically advantaged families and environments, they are more likely to succeed on standardized achievement tests than children that are from disadvantage families and environments (Popham, 1999). As a result, socioeconomic status is highly correlated with standardized test scores, as many test items focus on assessing knowledge or skills learned outside on schools.

In summary, Milner's (2012) three different concepts of the word urban provide a definition of the context for this research. Finally, Popham's work showed that from a technical and statistical point of view, state accountability assessments, which drive district and school letter grades, cannot be used in the way they are being used. Thus, one of the leading experts has laid out why state accountability assessments cannot perform the function they have been assigned by state and federal policy to perform. Nonetheless, all public schools and all public school educators must work within the present state

accountability assessment regime. And, it is within this regime that this study explored, based on a comparison of an urban Black school and an urban White school, that is, whether other factors—in this case, teacher quality, graduation rates, AP enrollment and success, and technology usage—align with the school’s letter grade.

Measures

Document Review

The four primary areas of data are teacher quality, AP enrollment and success, technology access, and graduation rate. These data were collected from the school district administration office. In addition, individual interviews with school administrators were conducted to collect information of their perspectives on the four areas.

Teacher Quality

Teacher quality was selected because the disposition of a teacher towards students and the delivery of the content can be predictor of how well students master state standards. In addition, the evaluation tool the school district used to determine a highly qualified teacher contained information of teacher performance ratings. These data were on the school district teacher evaluation high school summary report from the Human Resources office.

AP Enrollment and Success

AP enrollment and test success area was selected because this was a category a high school could receive points used to determine the state accountability grade. AP courses are rigorous high school courses that students can enroll in and have the potential to earn college credits. The data that were collected included the high school building

level course enrollment report, AP grade distribution report, and AP testing results report. These data were collected from the building administration.

Technology Access

Technology access was selected because most state and local accountability assessments were completed on a technology device and technology usage was increasing in the educational setting. Technology access is the access teachers and students have in an educational setting. The data collected included the school district technology plan and the technology data analysis report. These data were collected from the District Technology Administrator.

Graduation Rate

The graduation rate was selected because it was a category a high school could receive points to determine the overall school accountability grade. The graduation rate is the number of students within a cohort who graduates on time (four or five years) from high school. The graduation rate was collected from the state graduation report from the Department of Education and school administrators.

Interviews

A semi-structured interview, which was used for both individual and focus group interviews, involved “a particular set of questions and attempt to guide the conversation to remain, more loosely on the questions” (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2011, p. 102). A semi-structured interview was useful in the mixed methods research because it allowed conversation to be more natural as opposed to a structured format. In order to keep the natural conversation flowing, there were open-ended questions used in the research process. The two semi-structured interviews were conducted with each educator for an

average of fifty to sixty minutes. After the second semi-structured interview, there was one focus group conducted for about two hours. Finally, to maintain consistency with the setting of the interviews, the interviews took place in a closed-door environment room. This allowed for consistency and the collection of reliable information.

Research Participants

Interview participants were selected via snowball sampling, “snowballing sampling which is sampling from a known network” (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2011, p. 47). Snowball sampling was used to identify participants when appropriate candidates for a study were difficult to locate. District level educators were contacted personally to assist in locating locate participants.

The participants included two high school principals. The reason for selecting the two high school principals were the individuals would have a wealth of knowledge on explaining the data of the four selected areas in this research. In addition, these participants would be the best fit for the research because of their connections to the data and public perceptions of the urban schools. The school principals were asked about their experiences in the areas of teacher quality, AP enrollment and success, technology access, and graduation rate. Some examples of questions included, “how knowledgeable are you with the Indiana school accountability system and in reviewing the AP enrollment and success data?” and “How does the school/school district retain students of low social economic status and African American students in AP courses?” After individually interviewing the participants, a focus group was conducted that consisted of the participants from both school districts.

The reason for this focus group was to share the summary of data collected, the responses from the individual interviews anonymously in order to gain perspectives of how these educators collectively interpreted the data in the four areas in comparison to the state accountability letter grade. An example of a focus group question was, after sharing both school teacher quality data, “How does your teacher evaluation tool reflect the teacher quality in your high school?” Another focus group question was “How can teacher quality change when educating students of low economic status and African American students compared to low economic status and White students?”

Research Setting

The setting for the research was an urban White and African American high school in two different public school districts. The urban White and African American high school principals’ responses in the individual and focus group were significant parts of the data collection.

Data Collection

IRB approval was granted for the research from Indiana University. The Institutional Review Board (IRB) is “responsible for ensuring the U.S regulations proposed for human research and there is a benefit that out way the risk” (Hesse-Biber & Leavey, 2011, p. 63). Data were collected in the areas of teacher quality, AP enrollment, technology access, and graduation rate from a White urban high school and urban African American high school. In addition, data was collected from two semi-structured interviews and one focus group

In preparing for the focus group, the researcher developed new questions from the previous question format and answers. The follow-up questions were created from the

answers from the individual interviews. The focus group session was two hours. This allowed for data collection of dialogue between participants based on findings from the interviews.

Time Frame of the Study

The collection of the data was completed in one semester during the typical public school year. The data analysis and written findings were completed within six months after data collection conclusion. The data from the four areas, individual interviews, and focus group were analyzed as each was collected and until the end of the research period. An interview was completed during a semester with one administrators from each school district. After the individual interviews were completed, the focus group occurred in February.

Research Process

A formal meeting to introduce myself to each participant that agreed to be part of the research project occurred. The researcher communicated with each participate via email throughout the research study. The two selected participants of two different urban school districts participated in one interview and one focus group. All audiotape interviews were conducted in a closed-door setting in a school building. The purpose of the first interview was to obtain educational background information of each participant, understand the state accountability system, perception of graduation rate, AP enrollment, access to technology, and teacher quality in secondary high schools. After each first interview, the researcher reviewed the data by memoing and noting themes. Memoing is the writing of a document that tracks any ideas the researcher comes up with when reading notes, and interviews (Hesse-Biber, 2011). After a month from the last interview

of the second participant, the researcher conducted a focus group. In the focus group, the findings from the individual interviews were discussed, as well as follow-up questions. The information was analyzed in order to discern respondents' answers to the research questions after the collections of all the data from the four areas, interviews, focus group, and state letter grade for each high school.

Data Analysis

Several important data analysis steps occurred during and after the data collection. The audiotape interviews with each participant were transcribed. The transcription process is transferring oral words to written words (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2011). Furthermore, transcription allows the researcher the opportunity to be actively involved with the research from the beginning of the data collection (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2011). The transcript of all interviews were reviewed for recurring themes verifying common themes, and drawing conclusions.

The data collected through interviews and the focus group allowed for more insight into the AP enrollment, graduation rate, teacher quality, technology access, and state accountability grade. Secondly, the focus group notes were written-up with a reflection and description of the setting. When the focus group notes and transcription of interviews were reviewed and analyzed, the researcher coded all the themes together. I coded recurring themes verifying common themes, and draw conclusions. The themes that continuously occurred throughout the research were validated by trustworthiness.

Synthesizing Data

This section connected the individual and focus group responses of the participants from each focus area to the codes of 'human connection', 'perception', and

‘pay-off.’ After reading the responses from each individual interview, the similarities and differences in the answers from the participants’ responses were placed together. Next, the individual interview responses from each focus area were used to develop the clarifying questions for the focus group discussion. Finally, the completed focus coding was developed with all the data from the individual interviews and the focus group discussion. The participants’ responses for each focus area were placed in each code. Finally, I interpreted the participants’ responses to draw conclusions to the questions in the study.

Trustworthiness

The researcher used credibility, dependability, and transferability to establish trustworthiness. Trustworthiness was developed from the beginning to the end of this research. According to Lincoln and Guba (1985), prolonged engagement techniques can help to establish the truth-value and credibility. Prolong engagement provides a foundation for credibility by the researcher to learn the culture (Erlandson, Harris, Skipper & Allen, 1983). In addition, prolonged engagement helps the researcher build trust and develop a rapport with the respondents. The researcher used truth-value, consistency, and applicability as the criteria to establish trustworthiness. First, the strategy for assessing the criterion truth-value was credibility. Credibility was proven through member checking and reflexivity journal. The member checking was done by asking the participants to discuss the findings of the school data. As the member checking occurred, the participants could add or delete information in order to tell their story of the school.

Secondly, the strategy for assessing the criterion consistency was dependability (Erlandson, Harris, Skipper, & Allen, 1983). Dependability was proven through triangulation of data and the use of an independent coder. The triangulation of data included the focus group, interviews, and collection of information in the areas of AP enrollment, graduation rate, teacher quality, and technology access. Lastly, the strategy to assess the criterion applicability was transferable. Transferability was determined through the methodology, literature review, and purposeful sampling in the research.

In order to have credibility in the research, there was triangulation of different sources and methods. The source was data collection on each focus area. The different methods were semi-structured interviews and a focus group. After the interviews, member checking was implemented as a technique to establish trustworthiness throughout the research. The techniques used included member check, which provided credibility by allowing members to test interpretations. Additional techniques included reflective journaling and peer debriefing.

Positionality in Research

I have been an urban educator in a majority African American school district in various positions for nineteen years. I had the opportunity to work in a majority White urban school district after working in a majority African American urban school district. As I learned the new district, I was surprised this school district was categorized as urban. I found myself researching the meaning of the word urban because of how I was conditioned to think of it. Even when I referred to this district as urban to White people and people of color outside of the county, most had a perplexed look on their faces. In my new work experience, I wondered if there were differences academically between an

urban White and an African American high school. As I reflected on the perceptions of African American urban high schools and the state accountability grades they received, I became frustrated because this White urban school district was seen in a different way by individuals who worked in schools. I began to wonder about the state letter grade the schools received, and if it could be justified by graduation rates, AP enrollment, teacher quality, and technology access. Also, what was the level of importance of the four areas to the academic successes in an urban high school? In addition, how do these four areas influence individual perception despite the state accountability grade? Furthermore, I wondered if I researched the African American high school in the same areas as the White urban high school how would it compare. Lastly, I wondered if these perceptions by individuals could be different because the racial/ethnic differences of the urban high school.

Even though I have read many different pieces of data on high school performances in various areas, I do not believe it was an issue for me while completing this research. In addition, I do not think my current position or experiences had a large influence on my research. I attempted to suspend as much as I could of my personal opinions of AP enrollment, teacher quality, technology access, and graduation rate in an urban school district so I can understand others perspectives.

Conclusion

This research is important when comparing an urban White high school to an urban African American high school and the perceptions developed based on data shared with the public. In addition, the study illustrated whether mixed methods research could provide sufficient information on the perceptions of the two different high schools with

positive or negative views based on the data collected in the four areas and the state accountability grade. The information obtained from the research should be essential for urban school districts and states to validate the current system or to develop a more inclusive accountability system to acknowledge the areas that increase academic successes of urban students besides a state assessment.

CHAPTER FOUR: RESULTS

Introduction

In this study, I explored the comparison of a low income Black dominant urban high school (LIB) to a low income White dominant urban high school (LIW) in terms of school quality. Chapter Four includes the teacher and student demographic information of the LIB and LIW urban high schools. In addition, the education background information of the White school principal (WSP) and the Black school principal (BSP) is provided. Following the demographic information, the chapter is separated into the four focus areas of teacher quality, advanced placement, technology access, and graduation rate. Within each of the sections, the numerical data of the focus area of each school followed by the interview results and the analysis of the results will be included.

Demographics of the Two Schools

The LIW urban high school is located in a mid-size city in the Midwest. Table 1 consists of teacher ethnicity data in the LIW urban high school. The LIW urban high school teachers are 92% White and 2.5% teachers of color. There were high numbers of White teachers in the LIW urban high school.

Table 1. White Urban High School Teacher Ethnicity

| Teacher Ethnicity | 2015-2016 | 2016-2017 |
|-------------------|-----------|-----------|
| Asian | 0.8% | 0.9% |
| Latino | 1.7% | 1.8% |
| Black | 5.0% | 5.4% |
| White | 92.6% | 91.9% |

Table 2 includes the years of service of teachers in the LIW. This information indicated the percentage of new teachers to the teaching profession, as well as veteran teachers. An average of 34% of the teachers had 20 + years of experience in education, and 22% of teachers had 0-5 years of experience.

Table 2. White Urban High School Teacher Experience

| Years of Service | 2015-2016 | 2016-2017 |
|------------------|-----------|-----------|
| 0 -5 years | 20.7% | 23.4% |
| 6 – 10 years | 17.4% | 15.3% |
| 11-15 years | 14.9 % | 12.6 % |
| 16- 20 years | 14.9 % | 12.6 % |
| 20 years + | 32.2% | 36.0% |

Table 3 includes the enrollment information of students in the LIW urban high school by ethnicity. The student enrollment in the school was an average of 63% White and 37% students of color. Specifically, the Black student enrollment averaged 23% in the school.

Table 3. White Urban High School Student Enrollment

| Student Enrollment | 2015-2016 (n = 1,469) | 2016-2017 (n = 1,547) |
|--------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| White | 63% | 62.9 % |
| Latino | 3.6 % | 2.8 % |
| Asian | 0.5% | 0.5% |
| Black | 23.1% | 23.9% |
| American Indian | 0.3% | 0.4% |
| Multi-racial | 9.5% | 9.5% |

Lastly, Table 4 was a combination of information on free or reduced lunch students and students who were identified as English Language Learners. At the LIW urban high school, 67% of students paid for lunch and 33% of student received free or reduced lunch. An average of 17.2% of the students received special education services and an average of 0.2% received EL services.

Table 4. White Urban High School Student Demographics

| | 2015-2016 | 2016-2017 |
|---------------------------|-----------|-----------|
| Lunch Status | | |
| Free/Reduced | 66.9% | 68.0% |
| Student paid | 33.1% | 32.0% |
| Special Education Status | | |
| SPED | 17.2% | 17.2% |
| NON-SPED | 82.8% | 82.8% |
| English Language Learners | | |
| EL | 0.3% | 0.2% |
| NON-EL | 99.7% | 99.8% |

The LIB urban high school is located in a major city in the Midwest. Table 5 includes the district teacher demographic information because the district did not provide specific school information during the years of 2015-2016 and 2016-2017. The LIB urban high school also did not have teacher ethnicity demographic data available. Based on Table 5, the district teacher ethnicity indicated that 75.3% of the teachers were White and 24.7% teachers of color.

Table 5. Black Urban High School Teacher Ethnicity (2015-2016)

| Teacher Ethnicity | Percentage |
|-------------------|------------|
| Asian | 1.2% |
| Latino | 1.8% |
| Black | 19.4% |
| White | 75.3% |

Note: Only district percentage available; no school specific data

Table 6 contains information on the years of service of teachers in the LIB. The LIB had an average of 43% of teachers with less than five years of experience compared to an average of two percent of teachers with more than 20 years of experience.

Table 6. Black Urban High School Teacher Experience

| Years of Service | 2015-2016 (n=54) | 2016-2017 (n=55) |
|------------------|---------------------|---------------------|
| 0-5 years | 40 (74.1%) | 45 (81.8%) |
| 6-10 years | 3 (5.6%) | 1 (1.8%) |
| 11-15 years | 3 (5.6%) | 2 (3.6%) |
| 16-20 years | 5 (9.3%) | 5 (9.1%) |
| 20 years + | 3 (5.6%) | 2 (3.6%) |

Table 7 is the enrollment information of students in the LIB urban high school by ethnicity. The student enrollment was an average of 73% students of color.

Table 7. Black Urban High School Enrollment Ethnicity

| Student Enrollment | 2015-2016 (n = 513) | 2016-2017 (n = 463) |
|--------------------|------------------------|------------------------|
| White | 28.2% | 26.9 % |
| Latino | 31.8 % | 33 % |
| Asian | 0.0% | 0.2% |
| Black | 35.0% | 34.2% |
| American Indian | 0.0% | 0.0% |
| Multi-racial | 0.5% | 4.8% |

Lastly, Table 8 was a combination of information on free or reduced lunch students and students who were identified as EL. An average of 17.2% of the students received special education services and 0.3% of the students were identified for EL services. At this school, 67% of the students received free and reduced lunch.

Table 8. Black Urban High School Student Demographics

| | 2015-2016 | 2016-2017 |
|---------------------------|-----------|-----------|
| Lunch Status | | |
| Free/Reduced | 71.92% | 62.9% |
| Student paid | 28.0% | 37.1% |
| Special Education Status | | |
| SPED | 26.51% | 26.13% |
| NON-SPED | 73.49% | 73.87% |
| English Language Learners | | |
| EL | 14.81% | 16.20% |
| NON-EL | 85.19% | 83.8% |

There were significant similarities and differences when comparing the LIB and LIW urban high school information in each chart. The only similarity was in Tables 1 and 3: both the LIB and LIW had a significantly high number of White teachers. One difference was in Tables 2 and 4 on the years of experience. The LIW had a higher number of experienced teachers in comparison with the LIB that had a high number of teachers with less than five years of experience, indicating that the LIB had more inexperienced teachers while the LIW had more experienced teachers. Another difference

was in Table 5 and 7 on high school enrollment. There was higher numbers of White students attending the LIW compared to the number of students of color in the school.

Teacher Quality Scores by Schools

The Black School Principal (BSP) and the White School Principal (WSP) were interviewed separately in a closed-door room. Both the BSP and the WSP had several years' experience evaluating teachers. In the beginning of the interview, the teacher evaluation data that were provided from the school district human resource office was shared on the first interview question related to scoring teacher quality. Table 9 summarizes teacher quality data from each school district human resources office. The categories were based on the total points teachers received on their evaluations. The point range was printed on the teacher evaluation document. On the document, teachers were highly effective between 4.00-3.50 points; effective was 3.49-2.50 points, improvement necessary was 2.29-1.75, and ineffective was less than 1.75. As shown in Table 9, teachers in the LIB urban high school were placed in four different categories and teachers in the WIB urban high school placed in three categories. Based on the two-year data in the Table 9, the LIB urban high school had a total average of 57 teachers, with the majority placing in an effective category, and a significantly lower average of four teachers in the ineffective category. The LIW urban high school had a total average of 71 teachers, with the majority placing in the highly effective category and a significantly low average of 1.5 teachers in the needs improvement category.

Table 9. Urban High School Evaluation of Teacher Effectiveness

| Teacher Category | Black Urban HS | | White Urban HS | |
|--------------------------|----------------|------------|----------------|-----------|
| | n (%) | | n (%) | |
| | 2015-2016 | 2016-2017 | 2015-2016 | 2016-2017 |
| Highly Effective | 6 (10.3%) | 3 (5.4%) | 55 (64%) | 42 (75%) |
| Effective | 29 (50%) | 40 (71.4%) | 28 (32.6%) | 14 (25%) |
| Needs Improvement | 19 (32.8%) | 9 (16.1%) | 3 (3.5%) | |
| Ineffective | 4 (6.9%) | 4 (7.1%) | | |
| Total number of teachers | 58 | 56 | 86 | 56 |

Interview Results on Teacher Quality

In this section, there were three areas each followed by a researcher response to what the two principals said. The three areas are 1) General discussion of teacher quality, 2) Discussion of the Teacher Quality Evaluation Tool, and 3) Discussion of relation of teacher quality to school grade.

General Discussion of the Evaluation of Teacher Quality

The first question to the principals was based on the evaluation categories to determine the teaching quality. The BSP and the WSP shared their answers based on the evaluation information and their experiences in observing teachers in the classrooms.

The BSP said:

Teachers were scored on a number of factors. The final score came from the observations in the classrooms and other scores on the standards for success system. The teachers were observed and given feedback for improvement areas or their strong areas.

These scores were indicated in four categories in Table 9 on the evaluation tool. He continued to say that the evaluation tool computed the numbers entered in the system by the administrator. The BSP mentioned that there were other areas of information entered in the evaluation system such as personal goals, school goals, and professionalism. The scores in all these categories were added to determine the final

score for the teacher. The BSP did not elaborate on those areas of the evaluation nor the point system that determined the final score and category placement of the teacher.

In comparison to the BSP, the WSP answered the teacher quality question with additional details:

I thought that the largest chunk of the teacher evaluation rubric was on instruction. I thought teachers that had been effective or average in terms of instruction can offset the rating on the evaluation tool with providing evidence in other categories within the evaluation. Some of our teachers were very good at planning but maybe not good at implementing.

According to the WSP, teachers at his school rarely fell into the improvement necessary category. He credited administrators with doing a good job of providing supports for improvement once these challenges were identified. In addition, the WSP tried to put teachers who were in the needs improvement category on a plan of assistance to provide some support for them to be retained or encouraged them to select another line of work. He stated there were more teachers in the highly effectively category than effective. He thought that having more teachers in the highly effective category probably boiled down to the combination of the teachers' goals and the other areas of the evaluation rubric. The WSP mentioned in the focus group that if a teacher was not necessarily the best practitioner per se or best instructor, the rubric allowed for other areas that a teacher could gain additional points. In response to this, the WSP expressed several areas of concern that impacted the teachers points received on the evaluation that determined the category they were placed in at the end of the year.

One of the concerning areas was the Student Learning Objectives (SLO) goals that the teachers wrote themselves. The WSP said, "When teachers were given the opportunity to write their SLO's, teachers I guess learned how to play the game when it comes to picking particular targeted areas and trying to get mastery." This was

interpreted to mean teachers wrote goals to make sure they received the maximum points on the rubric. The WSP shared that the teachers had requested to change their SLO goals after they reviewed the second semester rosters and noticed they did not have the same students from first semester for which their previous SLO goals were based on for the school year. The salience here is that SLO goals were an area within the teacher evaluation to earn points. The WSP said he tried to be very flexible with the teachers about their SLO goals. He continued by saying he understood that teachers did not write lofty goals because they did not want to lose the opportunity to earn all the points possible in the teacher evaluation section on SLO goals. In addition, the WSP said the teacher evaluation total points and category placement was dependent on whether they had growth model data or not. The growth points were from the students' growth performances on the state assessment. At the end of the conversation, he expressed that the rubric used to calculate goals was not aligned well.

Another concerning area expressed by the WSP was that the rubric calculation points were not distributed to improve teachers teaching skills. The WSP also shared in the focus group that the evaluation rubric was set up with the core professionalism of planning and instruction as the biggest pieces of the evaluation. The reason the WSP answered the question with the rubric not aligning with evaluating the teacher's performances were that the overall scores could calculate high, to the benefit of the teachers. He explained:

If our school letter grade was high enough and depending on how a teacher did on a 4.0 scale with their student learning objectives (SLO) and teacher learning objective (TLO) with knowing the actual teacher effectiveness rubric outweighs those two categories. A teacher will be effective or highly effective if the school letter grade and their SLO and TLO scores were high.

The WSP shared he had constant conversations about playing the game with the SLO and the TLO (Teacher Learning Objectives) and tried to get the teachers to achieve a little bit higher standard than what they may be initially putting down for these goals. He said that it seemed to be more of an ongoing conversation than actually talking with them about improving instructional practice, building relationships, or actually working with students. He shared that he would like to see the shift that moved away from the focus of the teacher evaluation to a TLOs and SLOs.

During the focus group discussion, the WSP was more talkative than the BSP on the topic of teacher quality and the category ratings. The WSP shared with the BSP the steps he has taken to address the teaching in the classroom. The WSP informed the BSP that he was trying something new this year with the master schedule of not indicating if the students would stay with their teacher for second semester and class periods. Realistically, some teachers in second semester had a different group of students throughout the day than what they had first semester. The only complaint that he had ever gotten from the teachers was whether their SLO group or TLO group changed. The WSP shared that the school had built in some flexibility with that, but he thought part of what he wanted to see was students in an English 9 class go from one teacher to the next in second semester with limited disruptions. The WSP shared this process revealed the teachers that were not living up to their pacing guide, curriculum guide, or curriculum map. After the WSP made the switch of students at semester, he identified some of those weaker links without necessarily making teachers comfortable knowing that they had the same group of students the same period for the whole year. The WSP said he was interested in definitely exploring an evaluation tool or process that may place less

emphasis on teachers feeling like they have to “play the game” with an SLO or TLO and actually get more focused on what their performance was with building relationships and their instructional practices in the classrooms.

The WSP continued by saying that the observation model right now did not require the administration to get into the classrooms as often as he would probably like to in a formal evaluative sense. The WSP shared that administrators do walkthroughs twice a year with first and second year teachers. Teachers with more than two years of experience and rated effective the previous school year were observed once a year unless they were rated needs improvement, and then they were observed twice a year. He was not sure if that was a good practice or not.

In conclusion, there were similarities and differences between the LIW and LIB urban high schools on evaluation categories to determine the teaching quality. A similarity was both urban high schools used the same evaluation software system to enter teacher evaluation information used to determine their rating for the school year. In addition, both schools had teachers create their own evaluation goals for the school year. The difference was the BSP was less knowledgeable about the category placements of teachers and the way teachers earned the points to be placed in the categories. In contrast, the WSP was able to provide ample information on the categories and teachers strategies to earn points to be effective at the end of the school year.

My Reflection on Evaluation of Teacher Quality

After listening to the BSP during this part of the interview, I got the impression the BSP did not know the teacher evaluation data from the previous years based on him not being able to elaborate on the information without looking at the data several times. I

was surprised by this because it was midyear, and I had assumed he reviewed the teacher evaluation data history of teachers still working in the school prior to the start of the school year because this was his first year as principal of the building. Furthermore, his body language gave a message of disconnection to the data because he was not the administrator of the school in previous years despite being an administrator in the school district for several years. Additional evidence was his lack of conversation about any specific teacher working at the school or data in any category in Table 9. The BSP did not share the areas within the evaluation categories that had to be marked for teachers to receive particular points to determine the category placement. Based on the BSP not describing the areas within the categories that were used to determine where to mark teachers, I concluded that he had no knowledge of what to look for to mark teachers with the appropriate rating.

In contrast, the WSP answered the teacher quality question with details. He provided comprehensive examples of the type of teacher quality in his building. He was very talkative and expressed excitement when speaking on this topic. This was evident when the WSP talked about how teachers could maximize their points in each category to be placed in the effective or highly effective category. This gave me the impression the WSP knew how to calculate the points on the evaluation to determine the category a teacher could be placed in at the end of the year. However, despite his knowledge on calculation of the evaluation tool, the WSP was not able to talk about the specific components within the evaluation in detail that determined how teachers were marked on the rubric to calculate the final score. This led me to believe he had not been trained on

what to look for when observing a teacher in the classroom to mark the teacher appropriately in the sub-categories in the evaluation tool.

In conclusion, I was disappointed that the BSP and the WSP did not expound on the descriptive areas within the evaluation rubric and the ways the descriptions in the rubric were used during a class observation to rate a teacher. I was surprised to hear the WSP discuss how some teachers wrote goals to ensure they received the maximum points to keep them in the effective category. I wanted both principals to talk about how they used the rubric to ensure teachers were accurately marked on the evaluation tool. This caused me to think the goal writing by teachers was done out of fear of not being in the effective category and maintaining employment.

Discussion of the Teacher Quality Evaluation Tool

The next question for the two principals was related to the quality of the evaluation tool, which is used to indicate the quality of a teacher in the classroom. The BPS said, “In some respects, I thought the tool used to evaluate did not reflect what goes on in the classroom.” He thought one of the flaws with the tool was the difference of opinions or what an evaluator might see in regards to what some of the elements and standards were on the evaluation tool. Overall, he thought the evaluation tool met the standards of determining whether or not a teacher was a quality teacher, if a teacher needed additional supports, and if the teacher should be removed from the field of education

The WSP stated he did not believe, in his professional opinion, that the rubric the administrators were using necessarily identified the quality. He stated that it might not necessarily be the rubric but how it is used in the process of evaluating teachers. He

explained that the evaluation timeframe he used included giving the teachers a date range of when he would come in the classroom to do an observation. He continued with saying there were times, when completing an observation, he felt that he was not seeing something that was necessarily indicative of what happened on a daily basis. This was when he used his anecdotal notes with a teacher evaluation. He further explained that the anecdotal notes included the teacher attendance and student or parent complaints.

He suggested the evaluation rubric sometimes caused him to go through the evaluation process to get it completed on time. The evaluation process was a checklist of what task to complete by a certain deadline. The WSP expressed that going through the evaluation process timeline quickly contributed to the sheer volume of teachers he had to evaluate during the school year. The WSP did not want to generalize, but he thought that administrators probably had a good pulse on their buildings, aware of the problem area teachers, and prioritized how to handle those problem areas. He believed other teachers, for a lack of a better term, might be “off the hook” because they were not necessarily falling into one of those problem areas upon which administrators had to focus.

One of the other areas was the Student Learning Objectives (SLO) that teachers wrote themselves. He said, “When teachers were given the opportunity to write their goals or the SLO’s, teachers I guess learned how to play the game when it comes to picking particular targeted areas and trying to get mastery.” The WSP shared when teachers looked at their classes, it was amazing the number of conversations he had with teachers who requested an adjustment in their SLO when the classes do not necessarily stay intact from first semester to second. He said he tried to be very flexible with the teachers about their SLO goals. The WSP shared that the school state accountability

grade this past year was a C. He said the year before the school final state accountability letter grade was a B. He said he did not have the exact numbers in front of him, but he did remember seeing a significant number of teachers that fell into the effective and highly effective categories.

Regardless, the design of the teacher evaluation rubric had some things that could definitely stick out as major indicators that needed improvement, but the overall the rating itself was still “pretty” high for teachers. Furthermore, during the focus group, the BSP responded:

With regards to misalignment, the area that I see that’s most ... that’s not aligned with it in terms of ... is how you have to ... how do you assess the qualities of an effective teacher with regard to ... we actually currently use the Charlotte Danielson. The evaluation tool is pretty much based off the Charlotte Danielson model.

He continued stating that he had tried to find what he observed in the evaluation tool versus what the elements were in the tool. The BSP thought other areas that influenced teacher quality were not represented in the evaluation tool. His example was one when he was doing an observation, he is always looking for how were the teacher-student relationships developing so the students can connect with the teacher and connect with the content as well. He found himself trying to match what he saw with what was in the instrument, and it was often not there. Therefore, he suggested he had to use his best judgment, sort of documenting and associating the evidence that he saw with the respective elements and the instruments. The BSP thought a better alignment in that regard was a struggle. On the same issue, the WSP said:

I think the phrase that I sometimes equate to is like the dog and pony show. I know that was not a very professional statement, but many times our teachers can do a very good job in an observation when it was scheduled, or you give them a date range in which to come in. But it may

not necessarily give a true picture of what was happening in the classroom on any given day.

In addition, the principal thought he was not truly observing how the class operated daily.

In addition, the WSP said he agreed with the BSP that an evaluator should not go off script with the narrative. He said he found himself going through that process, especially when the WSP had to explain to staff members who were struggling in some areas. He shared he tried to use the evidence specifically aligned to the evaluation rubric. The WSP continued with an example of an evaluator saying to a teacher that here were some areas where there needs to be some improvement. The improvement areas may not necessarily be one hundred percent coexisting or line up with the rubric that he had to use. He said to the BSP, he thinks he is 100 percent right as well as everything we do is about building relationships. In addition, the WSP believed there was one area that he did not find in the rubric that he was using which was alignment connected to building relationships. The WSP said that he saw much of what the teachers were doing, and sometimes he can assess what the students were doing, but the interaction between what teachers were doing and what the students were doing was not as present as he thinks most evaluators would like it to be. He concurred with the BSP on the statements about the “dog and pony show.” Some of the other areas that he had issues with were in the core professionalism areas. The WSP stated it would be interesting to have a conversation with teachers to better understand what they were expecting from administrators and what administrators expected from teachers on the areas of professionalism. In addition, he would like to know how administrators wanted to see the professional expectations.

The final follow-up question was if the evaluation tool did not have all the components and was not aligned well, in what ways could the evaluation tool be improved? The BSP responded:

I think for us in my estimation in terms of how you improve the evaluation tool it is the ‘powers that be’ to make those decisions on which tool we use. In addition, the ‘powers that be’ would need to have conversations with the practitioners, meet with the building principals to see where the disconnection is in the evaluation tool, communicate with the union officials and some of the teacher leadership groups. In addition, take what we know were some of the issues and build around the issues for a better evaluation tool or go with another model. Then launch a study for the new direction or the current tweaked district model. This school district has been with the current model for six or seven years.

The BSP provided his thoughts on how the improvement could occur, but the district had other priorities due to the changes in many district positions. The BSP revealed that there has been no conversation about it at a district level. He said that the conversation has not occurred about the teacher evaluation tool because of the constant changes in the school district personnel and positions within the district to put a committee together to focus on improving the evaluation tool. He thought the district, teachers, and the other organizations had to keep a pulse on it because the evaluation piece is the most important piece of a teacher or professional teacher’s career. The BSP expressed that the evaluation tool has to be constantly looked at, revised, and tweaked.

The WSP said, “I agree with that too. In our district, we use a modified Rise. I can answer that question that the rubric we are using does not align with evaluating the teachers’ performances.” This quote meant that the description in the evaluation does not align with the rubric ratings. He shared that if the school letter grade is high enough, and depending on how a teacher rates on a 4.0 scale with their SLO and TLO, the actual teacher effectiveness rubric outweighs those two categories. It is very hard, or at least it

becomes very difficult for a teacher to be anything other than effective or highly effective if the school letter grade and their SLO and TLO are scored high enough. He continued saying:

So, we have constant conversations about almost playing the game with the SLO and the TLO trying to get our teachers to attain a little bit higher standard than what they may be initially putting down for what they are hoping to attain. This seems to be more of an ongoing conversation than actually talking about them with instructional practice or building relationships or actually working with students. I'd like to see the shift move away from worry more about a TLO or an SLO.

The WSP expressed that he would like to focus more on building relationships and setting higher instructional expectations. The WSP shared that in his school district he had something new he was trying with the master schedule. He did not necessarily indicate that the students would stay with their teachers for second semester and periods could change as well. Realistically, some teachers in second semester might have a different group of students throughout the day than what they had first semester. The WSP continued explaining if there was an outlier in terms of a teacher who was not living up to the pacing guide, curriculum guide, or curriculum map; he hoped he could identify some of those weaker links. He also mentioned he would be interested in exploring something that may take less emphasis off the teacher feelings that they had to put in air quotes "play the game" with an SLO or TLO and actually be more focused on what their performance is with building relationships and their instructional practices in the classroom.

My Reflection on the Teacher Quality Evaluation Tool

After listening to the BSP, I took the BSP quote on the evaluation tool to mean that the evaluation tool did not have all the categories needed to accurately reflect classroom activities and environment. I also interpreted the BSP quote on Charlotte

Danielson as the foundation for the evaluation tool used in the school district. In addition, he does not use the elements in the evaluation tool as to what he should see in the classroom. Instead, he took what he saw in the classroom and attempted to align it to the evaluation tool. The BSP response on the improvement of the evaluation tool I interpreted to mean that the improvement of the evaluation tool was determined at the school district office level not building level. I took the WSP quote on the evaluation process to mean that the teachers taught well when they were aware of the evaluation date.

The BSP and the WSP used the same evaluation and shared recommendations that should be added to the tool and ways to improve the evaluation process. The first recommendation was both principals wanted to add a category with components that focused on student-teacher relationships. Both the BSP and the WSP understood the importance of student-teacher relationship and its connection to student learning in the classroom. They thought that student-teacher relationship could significantly influence the academic performance of a student in the classroom. I agreed that this area needed to be added and expounded on, but the principals would need to receive on-going training to know what that looks like in the classroom.

The BSP and the WSP also mentioned the evaluation tool seemed like it was completed for compliance only. Such compliance meant to them that it was another task to be completed by the deadline dates with complete paperwork. These two principals appeared to be worried about making sure all the documents were completed on time to prevent a reprimand from their supervisor. I did not get the impression that the evaluation tool helped the principals determine the type of quality that a person should observe in

the classrooms. Due to the lack of explanation on what quality looked like in the classroom by both principals, there appeared to be a need for on-going professional development on the Charlotte Danielson book if that is the foundation of the evaluation tool. It was apparent that both the BSP and the WSP had not been trained recently because of the lack of conversation on each area of the rubric that was used for teachers to earn points that determined their category placements. Since there was a lack of explanation on the components of the evaluation tool, I understand why the BSP would say quality depends on the perception of the evaluator. For example, the BSP said that the evaluation tool captured the teaching quality and that that depended on the evaluator. He thought that every evaluator defined quality teaching differently. This was in contrast to the WSP who said that the tool did not capture teacher quality. For example, the teachers knew how to earn points in the goal area, and teachers were aware when their evaluator was observing them in the classrooms. However, neither provided a description of the areas within the categories or the connection to the quality of teaching in the classrooms. This observation confirmed that the principals need on-going professional development on evaluating teachers.

Discussion of the Relation of Teacher Quality to School Grade

Table 10 reflected the letter grades of the LIB and LIW urban high schools received by the department of education for the 2015-2016 and 2016-2017 school years. The letter grades were based on the number of students who passed the state assessment, graduation percentage, college and career points and growth of the students. At the LIB urban high school, the overall letter grade remains the same. The LIW urban high school the overall letter grade increased to a B.

Table 10. School Student Centered Accountability Grade

| | LIB Student Centered Accountability | | LIW Student Centered Accountability | |
|----------------|--|-----------|--|-----------|
| | 2015-2016 | 2016-2017 | 2015-2016 | 2016-2017 |
| Overall Grade | D | D | C | B |
| Overall Points | 61.6 | 66.9 | 79.1 | 85.6 |

The final question on teacher quality was how it related to the school grade. The BSP replied, “Whenever you assign grades to something, you were creating parameters of good, better, best, not so good, etc. Ultimately, with so many factors that go into what an F or D or C or B or A meant I did not think it really captured teacher quality.” He thought it did a very accurate job of capturing the academic performance of students. The BSP thought the letter grade reflected where school was despite the other issues that impacted students’ performances on the state assessment.

However, there was a drastic difference in the answers between the BSP and the WSP on the connection of teacher quality to the performance of students on the state assessment. The BSP shared the state letter grade did not capture what a teacher was doing in the classroom in educating students. In reviewing the data charts for the BSP, (i.e., Table 9: Teacher Evaluation Categories) the chart indicated that there were a significant number of teachers in the effective category, but the school earned a letter grade of a ‘D’ for the last two years (as indicated on Table 10: Student Centered Accountability Grade). The BSP said, “I do not think it does a very accurate job of capturing the true quality that the teacher displays in the classrooms day to day given the level of enormity of issues that they have to work through in order for the academic piece to be reflected in the grade.”

In comparison, the WSP commented on the relation of teacher quality to the letter grade in vagueness but expressed how the student's growth impacted the overall letter grade for school:

Teacher quality, I am not sure if there were other areas on the standardized test to connect teacher quality and the state accountability grade. I had some good English and Math teachers that did not always see the results of how hard their work. The growth model helped in areas where the school can see academic gains of students.

The WSP said he was thankful the schools had the growth matrix available because their growth score actually kept them from being really in the "doghouse" because the state had an average of 20 or 30 percent pass rate. In addition, the WSP expressed a concern that there were students who never passed that test, but continued to close the gap with the points earned on the state assessment. Furthermore, the WSP stated that the academic growth of a student has been added as a factor to calculate the school state accountability grade. Evidence of this was reflected in Table 10 above. The WSP's data reflected the school had a significant number of teachers highly qualified, and yet the school received a letter grade of a 'C' in 2015-2016 and a letter grade of a 'B' in 2016-2017. The WSP said, "By the state adding the growth model to the state accountability grade, you can see the instruction that has happens in the classroom."

My Reflection on the Relation of Teacher Quality to School Grade

After listening to the BSP, I determined from his answers that he was not aware of the growth points on the calculation of the state accountability because he did not mention it. He said that the letter grade did not provide information on teacher quality, but he did not explain why he thought this way. The BSP expressed through his tone that the letter grade from the state did not reflect the day-to-day activities that occurred in a school to educate students and demonstrate their knowledge on a state test. I interpreted

his quote on the accountability grade to mean that there were additional issues positive or negative that a school staff had to help students cope with in order to learn during class time to demonstrate what they know on the state assessment. Also this quote from the BSP provided a message that the school had to prepare students academically and mentally to take an assessment that defined the school. Unlike the BSP, the WSP focused on the growth of students and not the pass rate of students in the school. The WSP appeared to be more knowledgeable on the calculation of the accountability points and letter grade. With enthusiasm, he talked about how the school earned points in the other areas besides testing to determine the overall grade of the school. The WSP realized how important growth was to the points earned on the state accountability assessment and teacher quality. The WSP used the word ‘doghouse’ in his response to the state average passing rate that I interpreted as a school being listed as poor performing and the district administration not pleased with being listed as a poor performing school.

Both the BSP and the WSP separately understood that the accountability system was based on the pass rate on the state assessment and teacher quality. However, both struggled to explain the connection between the two topics in detail during the interview. This was evident when the WSP and the BSP were not able to explain the areas in the evaluation categories and the way those areas provided a framework of what to look for in the classrooms to know what quality teaching looked. Thus, both appeared to need more professional development to understand the accountability system.

Advanced Placement Scores by Schools

In the beginning of the interview, the advanced placement data that were provided from the school districts was shared. The first question was on the contribution of

supporting student enrollment in advanced placement classes. Table 11 summarizes the number of students who participated in advanced placement (AP) testing. As shown in Table 11, the LIB and LIW urban high schools had more students take the AP testing in 2015-2016 than 2016 - 2017. Despite the decrease in student participation in AP testing for both high schools, the LIW urban high school had more students participating in the test across the two years.

Table 11. AP Testing Participants LIB/LIW

| | LIB | | LIW | |
|------------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|
| | 2015-2016 | 2016-2017 | 2015-2016 | 2016-2017 |
| AP Testers | 155 | 49 | 218 | 194 |

Table 12 is the calculation of college career readiness percentage for the LIB and LIW urban high schools. The CCR Achievement is a combination of students who passed advanced placement exams, international baccalaureate, dual credit, and certification. Both high schools had a decrease rate in the CCR Achievement from 2015-2016 to 2016-2017. As shown in Table 12, the LIB had a significant decrease rate of 9.9 % from 2015-2016 to 2016 -2017 as compared to the LIW rate of 0.5%. In 2016-2017, there was a sharp decline in students taking the advanced placement test in the LIB urban high school in comparison to the LIW urban high school.

Table 12. State Student Center Accountability CCR Indicator

| | LIB | | LIW | |
|----------------------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|
| | 2015-2016 | 2016-2017 | 2015-2016 | 2016-2017 |
| CCR Achievement Rate | 39.3% | 29.4% | 57.7% | 57.2% |

Interview Results on Advanced Placement

In this section, there are four areas each followed by the researcher response to what the two principals said. The four areas are 1) General discussion of advanced placement, 2) Discussion of the recruitment, 3) Discussion of the retention of students in

advanced placement classes, and 4) Discussion of relation of advanced placement to school grade.

General Discussion of the Evaluation of Advanced Placement

The first question to the principals was based on the enrollment of student in the advanced placement classes. The BSP and the WSP shared their answers based on the summary of advanced placement data, college and career readiness information, and their experiences in maintaining advanced placement classes. The BSP said, “The district had some guidelines in terms of identifying and enrolling students into AP classes.” The BSP personally believed it was very important that school leadership had a very active role in ensuring that students had access to higher-level class work that prepared them to be successful in college. Despite the BSP personal beliefs, he did not expound on those beliefs during the interview.

In comparison to the BSP, the WSP answered the advanced placement question with more detail. The WSP said, “The school contributed through participating in AP-TIP, Teacher Investment Program.” The teacher investment program was a two-year cohort model. He explained that there were two goals in AP-TIP. The first goal was to increase access to AP classes for all students. The WSP said the school never had prerequisites, at least in his administration years, for students to take AP classes. Therefore, without prerequisites, the AP classes were open enrollment to students who felt they could handle it and the school gave them the opportunity. After the students had been enrolled in the advanced placement classes, the WSP mentioned that at semester, or maybe even at the end of first grading period, some students could self-select to withdraw out of the classes. The WSP shared the school had an increase in AP student enrollment

numbers, especially from 2016 to 2017, which was one of the goals with AP-TIP. The second goal with AP-TIP was to increase the number of students passing AP exams. He said:

Ironically, tonight was our first ever AP banquet where we were going to pass out incentives to our students. Every student who passed an AP exam will get \$100 incentive for every test the student passes. I passed out some \$600 dollars to one student tonight. I thought by incentivizing AP in terms of passing exams, I used the phrase that 'it puts some skin in the game' for them. The weighted grade that comes with the AP classes was contingent upon the student taking the exam. Most all of the students that were in AP at the end of the year take the exam, but obviously not all of them passed the exam.

The WSP thought opening up AP classes without prerequisites and attempting to change the teachers' mindset to having some students that did not fit into a particular box attempt AP classes was a big help in increasing enrollment. The WSP explained 2017 was the first time the school offered Honors Geography History of the World to freshman. This course was weighted with the intent that those students would transition into AP World History as sophomores. He shared that three sections of AP World History were scheduled this year, which had not traditionally been the case. The WSP shared the AP World History was a class that the school had increased student enrollment because they had intentionally identified students early on and provided them with necessary supports. The supports were not a prerequisite to be enrolled in AP World History. He shared that the school went from having barely one section two to three years ago to now having three sections of that class:

The school directly contributed to access to AP classes. I guess I did not know if I directly contributed to them passing because I was not teaching the class, but I definitely tried to put enough supports in place to where our teachers had the resources to make every student aware of what was on the exam and prepared for the exam. I thought the school staff had done a good job of increasing the number we have in AP.

In conclusion, there were similarities and differences between the LIW and LIB urban high schools on advanced placement enrollment. The main similarity at both LIW and LIB urban high schools was the use of student grades as a qualifier to be considered for an advanced placement class. One difference was how the students' academic records were viewed by the staff of how the students would perform in the AP classes in the LIB and LIW urban high schools. For example, the BSP said, "I looked at the academic data of the student's previous and current year." In addition, the BSP shared that typically the school staff would always look at the student's previous academic performance, such as previous honor class enrollment because those students typically moved into the AP classes. Unlike the BSP, the WSP shared there were not prerequisites for students to be enrolled in AP classes. He shared AP was open enrollment to students who felt like they could handle it. The WSP shared the school offered Honors Geography History of the World class to freshman. The WSP said, "I know without having prerequisites and trying to open the mindset of our teachers to really anybody wanting to attempt AP would be difficult."

Another difference discussed in the focus group was the BSP emphasized how students viewed the AP classes as an opportunity for failure not success. For example, the BSP said, "Trying to get the students to shift that mindset about it is not about what if I fail? It is what if I pass?" He expressed the students did not see how taking a more rigorous class was preparing them to be successful after high school. Unlike the BSP, the WSP talked more about the type of student taking the AP classes. He mentioned that the school took the best students and stretched them by encouraging them to take the AP classes because they made the school look good. In addition, LIW expounded on the

money incentives for students to not only take the exam, but to do well in order to be rewarded for the AP exam. He said it was to encourage the students to invest more into themselves and the AP classes. Unfortunately, the BSP did not have anything similar to the monetary incentive.

My Reflection on the Evaluation of Advanced Placement

After listening to the BSP talk briefly about the contribution to advanced placement enrollment, I was disappointed with his lack of implementation to increase the enrollment of students in the classes. In addition, he lacked vision on how to expand the advanced placement classes at the LIB urban high school. Even though the BSP said that leaders should play an essential role in advanced placement programs, he did not mention what that looked like for him. Based on the BSP comments, I interpreted that he did not have a vision or plan of what the role looked like for leadership to provide access to students of color attending the LIB urban high school. This lack of explanation gave me the impression that increasing the advanced placement program was not a priority even though some classes were available for students.

The BSP seemed not to follow the ‘open access’ set by College Board to enroll students in advanced placement classes. I interpreted his quote on AP class to mean the school district had academic requirements for students to be enrolled in advanced placement classes. It was obviously that he expected the potential AP students to have a particular grade point average and have passed the state assessment to be considered for advanced classes. This was disappointing to me because some students who failed the state assessment or had ineffective teachers could do well in an advanced placement classes with the appropriate supports. I interpreted the BSP quote on the students’

mindset of AP classes to mean that students had preconceived ideas about how difficult the advanced classes were and that they could not be successful in the classes. In addition, the student could not visualize the success of passing the class. I wondered why this because of their academic performance on the state assessment. I was very perplexed that there was not a community partnership to help incentivize the students attending the LIB urban high school, and the BSP did not speak about trying to establish a relationship with a community partner for AP incentives. The lack of information and conversation from the BSP continued to confirm the lack of connection to improve and increase the advanced placement classes at the LIB urban high school.

Unlike the BSP, the WSP seemed to be enthusiastic about the changes in the advanced placement classes. He was excited to talk about the partnership with Notre Dame AP-TIP program and other community partners to increase student enrollment and teacher skills. The WSP had a vision of how he wanted to use the incentives to increase student motivation to take the advanced placement exams. In addition, he had a vision to establish the incentives, increase community partnerships, and increase parent awareness of students enrolling in advanced placement classes. I interpreted the WSP quote on prerequisites and changing teachers' mindset to mean that having a class for students that was similar to an advanced placement class would better prepare students for an AP class. Even if the students do not fit the academic profile of that the teachers want in the classes, it forced the teachers to be more open to accepting diverse students. Also, he talked about how he wanted to change the mind-set of the teachers to make the advanced placement classes truly "open access" to all students who wanted to take a class. The

WSP appeared to be focused on increasing student enrollment and class offerings for students.

Discussion of Student Recruitment in Advanced Placement Classes

The next question for both principals was related to recruitment of students of color in advanced placement classes. The BSP believed it was important to be deliberate in exposing the students to the classes. The BSP mentioned some of the strategies to recruit student of color during the interview:

One of the strategies that I look at was one the academic data of the student's previous and current year. The question I had while reviewing academic data were how were those students participating in those classes? So if you had a low number of students of color in AP classes over a period of time, you know that you probably need to put a little bit more focus on seeing were we accurately identifying these students?

The BSP shared that the school staff in 2018 moved forward with looking at the student's previous academic grade performance in classes such as previous honor classes to determine which students would be enrolled in AP classes. The BSP questioned how would you put students in honor classes if you did not look at previous academic school years. He continued, "So we had to take a look at student's academic performance, get teacher input on the students as well as conversations with the students about taking more challenging classes and how the classes prepared them for a better future in terms of college, postsecondary." He mentioned that the school counselors worked together to create a master schedule to provide a time slot for AP classes to be available for students who were identified to be in the advanced classes.

The WSP replied, "I know without having prerequisites and with trying to open the mindset of our teachers to really anybody wanting to attempt AP was difficult to comprehend." The WSP was not able to speak to a specific idea that had been successful

other than the culture of some of the teachers in the school building. Specifically, the culture of only wanting a specific type of learner, like an honors student, or a student who had AP before in advanced placement classes was the standard. The WSP clarified that the type of student who was willing to do the work should have the opportunity to be in advanced placement classes. He seemed inclined to offering excuses for not increasing the number of students of color in AP classes, while not presenting specific strategies to try to increase their presence in these classrooms. The WSP thought the school did a very good job recruiting students to take college prep classes, but these efforts did not extend to AP classes. The WSP believed the school did a very good job in the early college selection process of trying to make sure the early college program mirrored the admissions per se that the students were accepted into a college. The school wanted to mirror the makeup of the high school, but he thought AP was one of those areas where you could lose track because you were thinking you did not have any restrictions to requesting an AP class. The WSP shared the school was not very intentional about making sure that there was a certain group of students that they would 'cater' to which he admitted may not be the right wording, but the school was trying to increase those opportunities with the early college program. The WSP said:

The early college program had an application and a selection process unlike the AP that any student can sign up, took the class if you wanted to take the class. I thought whether it was a minority student, or a student with a socioeconomic status different from what we considered as the stereotype that normally did not take AP that there was no strategy to recruit. The strategy the school employed was really trying to do a better job of explaining what occurred in these classes, the expectations and not let AP be some type of negative acronym or connotation. I thought the teachers did a good job of trying to scare students that AP was an elite level of academics.

Unlike the early college program, the WSP expressed he did not know if the school staff was doing anything intentional to try to make sure the AP enrollment mirrored what the building enrollment was. The WSP further explained AP classes were something that many of the universities had put a lot of stock into, but he ventured to say that some of their early college classes, even community colleges, could be a little bit more strenuous in terms of academic rigor.

In conclusion, there were similarities and differences in recruiting students of color in advanced placement classes. The one similarity was sharing the benefits with parents when trying to recruit students of color for the advanced placement classes. The BSP said the LIB staff shared with students the cost savings of earning a college degree, the description of AP classes, and the college or career preparation of the student. In addition, LIB staff communicated to parents about the benefits of students enrolling in the classes who took the exam and obtained a certain score on the AP exam (i.e. transferable college credits). Like the BSP, the WSP mentioned how the counselors did a good job speaking with parents and students about advanced placement classes. The WSP acknowledged the school staff needed to do a better job on the explanation of the advanced placement classes.

A difference between the two urban high schools was the recruitment incentives for the students in the advanced placement classes. Unfortunately, the BSP did not have incentives to talk about in the interview. The WSP mentioned the incentives for students who took the AP exams such as every student who passed an AP exam received \$100. The WSP thought incentivizing AP classes in terms of passing exams would motivate students to 'put some skin in the game' and do their best in the classes. In the focus

group, the WSP expounded on the monetary incentives for students to not only take the exam, but to do well and be rewarded for the AP exam. The weighted grade that came with the AP classes was contingent upon the student taking the exam. The WSP said, “Most all of the students that were in AP classes at the end of the year took the exam, but not all of them pass the exams.”

My Reflection on Student Recruitment in Advanced Placement Classes

After listening to the BSP and the WSP, it was obvious that neither one had ever focused on recruiting students of color to AP classes. When I interviewed the principals individually and asked the same question, both had the same response: they focused on recruiting *all* students to be advanced placement classes rather than adopt a particular focus on students of color. I felt my question caught both principals off guard because I specifically asked about recruitment of students of color. However, both principals skirted the question. Based on the WSP quote on prerequisites, I interpreted it to mean that teachers would not be accepting of students in the advanced placement classes if there was no prerequisite class or requirements, especially if the students do not have a high grade point average and passed the annual state assessment. The WSP did acknowledge that focusing on students of color was an improvement area. The BSP did not mention anything about improving how to recruit students of color other than grades and passing the state assessment. Based on the BSP quote on the recruitment of Black and Latinx students to AP classes, I interpreted this response to mean that the school counselors reviewed students’ academic records. Based on the academic records the school counselor had conversations with teachers about students, talked to students about the AP classes, and talked to parents about the monetary benefit of taking the advanced

placement classes in high school. This was disappointing to me because the school was majority students of color and the BSP, from my perspective, should have had several ideas on recruiting students of color in advanced placement classes.

I did not think either principal realized the additional communication that was needed with students of color, as well as with parents, to capture their interest in advanced placement classes. In addition, there was the impression from the WSP and the BSP that they should not have to focus on one racial group over other races. In contrast, I see successful strategies for AP recruitment among students of color as one, communicating differently with students of color and their parents on the significance of these classes, and two, acknowledging the benefits of being in the advanced placement classes.

Discussion of Student Retention in Advanced Placement Classes

The next question was on the retention of students of color in advanced placement classes. The BSP talked about the strategies to retain Black and Latinx students in AP classes. He said there were many supports that went into retaining diverse students. First, it was important to have the right AP teacher possessed the content knowledge and understood the College Board expectations for teaching the class. The BSP said, “More importantly, you need a teacher who can encourage students while enrolled in the advanced placement class, especially when parts of the curriculum can become challenging instead of pushing the students to give up and drop the class.”

The BSP mentioned the counselors in the school were always available to listen to the students who were enrolled in the AP classes and discuss any academic challenges. He shared that the staff tried to make sure that parents understood the available AP

classes, how they prepared students for college or life after high school, and the cost savings of earning a college degree. In addition, the staff communicated to the parents about the benefits of students enrolling in the classes and receiving A/B grade, taking the exam, and obtaining a certain score that could lead to transferable college credits before enrolling in a college. The BSP continued to highlight the importance of helping parents understand the cost savings for their children who could be attending college. He expressed he wanted to try to give the students a wide range view of AP classes and the benefits of the classes in preparation of life after high school. The BSP did not explain during the interview how he would provide a wide range view of AP classes.

In contrast, the WSP said, “The strategies were not specific to diverse students, but for any student who was thinking about withdrawing or struggling academically in the AP class.” He shared that the counselors did a good job of making sure they had conversations with the students to urge them to persevere and not be discouraged in these classes. These conversations occurred whether it was with the diverse students or any of the students taking an AP class. The WSP explained that most students felt that their cumulative GPA was affected by being challenged in AP classes. He did not think it mattered whether the students were interested in the class or not. The WSP continued to say the students were going to choose an easier path to maintain their overall cumulative GPA versus challenging themselves. In addition, the WSP revealed he talked about the Latin GPA system at the surface with other administrators, but that he had not done the research yet on looking at how schools did in class ranking systems and how to transition to a Latin system. Maybe a different high school ranking system would open up some

students who had an interest in trying AP classes to actually try them and not be so worried about their overall academic standing.

In conclusion, a similarity between the WSP and the BSP was the communication of advanced placement classes. For example, the BSP said, “More importantly, you need a teacher who can encourage students while enrolled in the advanced placement class.” The BSP mentioned that the counselors in the school were always available to listen to the students enrolled in the AP classes talk about academic challenges. The WSP also mentioned supports similar to the BSP. The WSP said, “He shared [that] the counselors do a good job of making sure they have the conversations with the students to really kind of stick it out and not be so discouraged in the class.” The WSP stated, “The strategies would not be specific to diverse students, but it would be for any student.” He made it clear this type of conversation would occur whether it was with diverse students or not. In the focus group, both participants discussed communicating about the benefits of taking the AP classes with students. Both the WSP and the BSP revealed that there were competing outside influences that caused students not to take AP classes because they did not have the time to study and apply themselves to the class. Some of the outside influences were jobs, sports, and other school extra-curricular activities.

Even though the BSP and the WSP communicated about the advanced placement classes, who they communicated with was different. The BSP, unlike the WSP, had the staff communicating with parents about the benefits of students enrolling in the classes, earning a good grade, taking the AP exam, and obtaining a certain score that could lead to transferable college credits before enrolling at a college campus. The WSP tended to

focus on communicating with students based on the comments noted earlier in the interview.

My Reflection on Student Retention in Advanced Placement Classes

After listening and reflecting on the responses from the BSP and the WSP, there was not an intentional focus on retaining students of color from both of them. There was not acknowledgement from either principal that students of diverse backgrounds, specifically students of color, need different supports and strategies to keep them in advanced placement classes. The retention strategies mentioned by the BSP and the WSP were not unique to students of color. At the time of the interview, neither principal expressed that they had any specific strategies for retaining students of Color in advanced placement classes. The BSP and the WSP used retention strategies that were good for all students regardless of their race. During the interview and particularly because I asked specifically about the retention of students of color, I continued to sense the principals' uneasiness to talk about race. I am not sure if the BSP or the WSP thought I would be offended by their comments. I did not want a 'safe' answer, but an honest answer to gain a better understanding of how LIB and LIW urban high schools retain students of color in advanced placement classes.

Discussion of Relation of Advanced Placement to School Grade

The final question on this topic was on the relation of advanced placement to the school grade in CCR percentage (See Table 10 and Table 12). The BSP replied that he thought the AP data were reflected on the state school accountability grade and could affect access for future students. He clarified that AP data on the state report did reflect the gains and the expectations that students had been exposed to and that students had

access to challenging curriculum that would help them be successful at the next level. The BSP ended his response saying, “If the state accountability letter grade provided insight on the long-term impact of being enrolled in advanced placement classes it would help students to academically do well in AP classes and increase enrollment in AP classes.”

In contrast, the WSP replied that he saw a percentage increase in the College and Career Readiness (CCR) area. The school had about 50% to 52% of on time graduates in the CCR category, which was 25% of maximum points a school can receive in the category. He shared that meant the school had more than double the number of students in the CCR category, but the school would like it to increase the number of on time graduates in the CCR category. The WSP felt that if a school had a high percentage of CCR and graduation rate, the school received the maximum points in both of those areas. As a result, he said it was going to be hard to be anything other than a D because of the number of students who passed the state assessment. The WSP said, “Your test results could ultimately ratchet up whether your school accountability grade goes up to a C or B or an A.”

In conclusion, the WSP and the BSP shared comments that the students enrolled in AP classes and took the AP exams were reflected in the school state accountability grade. Both principals had communicated the shared benefits of taking AP classes to students and parents. The data reflected in Table 11 show the number of students who took the AP exams. Each school had a decrease in students taking the AP exams from 2015-2016 to 2016-2017, but the schools earned points from the state to contribute to the state accountability grade. For example, the BSP replied that he thought the AP data were

reflected on the state school accountability grade and could affect access for future students. He clarified AP data on the state report did reflect the gains and the expectations that students were exposed to challenging curricula that would help them be successful in college. The WSP's school had 50% to 52% of on time graduates in the CCR category, which was 25% of the maximum points. He shared that meant that the school was more than double the AP percentage.

My Reflection on Relation of Advanced Placement to School Grade

After reflecting on what I heard from the BSP and the WSP, both knew that the students passing the advanced placement exams contributed to the points earned on the state student accountability report. The WSP provided more details in his answers on the state accountability report. Based on the WSP answers, I interpreted that he knew that the school letter grade could increase based on the number of students who passed the AP test in addition to the multiple measures points. Unlike the BSP, he was not as knowledgeable of the possible points earned in the accountability report. It was discouraging to me that the BSP did not mention how he would increase the number of advanced placement classes and enrollment for students in the AP exam to earn more points for the school letter grade. I interpreted the BSP quote on wanting AP data on the long-term impact of students being enrolled in advanced classes to mean that if the BSP had data on how advanced placement classes impacted students' futures he would enroll more students in the classes. Again, there appeared to be no focus on advanced placement classes in the LIB urban high school or the negative impact of a lack of students on the AP exam to gain points to improve the overall letter grade assigned to the school.

Student academic records were reviewed by the school counselors to determine if the students should be in an AP class in the African American and White urban high schools. The White urban high school provided an academic unofficial prerequisite to prepare students for AP classes. The African American urban high school principal attempted to change the mindset of students to enroll in AP classes; however, it lacked a plan on how to make this happen. The White urban high school principal was focused on changing the mindset of the teacher on the typical students enrolled in the AP classes. In addition, there were more students attending the LIW urban high school who took the AP exams compared to the African American urban high school students. An incentive program for taking the AP exam and earning a particular score was established at the White urban high school. The African American urban high school had no existing incentive AP program.

Technology Access by School

In the beginning of the interview, the district technology plan that was obtained from the district website and CIO was shared with the principals. Table 13 summarized the technology plans of the school district that included the urban high schools and future plans. Data were selected from the plans that were significant to the research. As shown in Table 13, both urban high schools used the learning management system (LMS) called Schoology. The LIB urban high school had one district provider unlike the LIW urban high school who had three providers for the students to utilize for learning content. Each urban high school had access to laptops. There were two major differences between the two urban high schools. The first was there was no evidence of 1:1 device program at the

secondary level (grades 6th -12th). Second, the LIW urban high school had five coaches and the LIB had one coach districtwide.

Table 13. District Technology Plan

| Technology Access | LIB | LIW |
|---------------------------|-------------|---------------------------|
| # of FTE Tech | 40 | 6 |
| # of FTE | 1 | 5 |
| % of Digital Content | 10% | 20% |
| District Wi-Fi Access | All Schools | All Schools |
| District 1:1 Status | None | Grades 6-12 |
| # of Student Devices | 13000 | 3750 |
| Device at high school | HP Laptop | Asus, HP Chromebook |
| Main LMS | Schoology | Schoology |
| District Online Providers | Edmentum | APEX, Pearson, Connect-Ed |

Interview Results on Technology

In this section, there are four areas each followed by my response to what the two principals said. The four areas are 1) General discussion of the principal contribution to technology access at the building level, 2) Discussion of maintaining technology in the building 3) Discussion of the teacher and student expectation of technology usage, and 4) Discussion of relation of technology access to school grade.

General Discussion of the Principal Contribution to Technology Access

The first question was based on the principal’s contribution to technology access for teachers and students in the schools. The BSP said that he had been involved in some of the district’s technology plans. He also informed me that he was on a committee that started the One-to-One Program (1:1) in the middle schools where teachers and students were trained on how to use the devices. In addition, the teachers were trained on different educational ways technology could be implemented in the classroom to increase student learning. In contrast to the BSP, the WSP spoke about his experience in his current school district and the use of the 1:1 iPads in the high school before he became principal,

and the transition to Chromebooks after he became the principal. He said that he worked with many other administrators to make technology available to all students in the school. The WSP thought the contribution he had made was not necessarily for securing access, but updating the devices and the wireless access points. The WSP said he could not take credit for the overall improvement in the organization of the 1:1 device, but he felt as the building principal he had to develop a plan in order for it to be successfully implemented in the school.

In conclusion, the most common similarity between the BSP and the WSP was that neither principal understood the importance of their role in the contribution to technology access for students and teachers. Based on their responses, it was clear that they had no significant decision making power and that their contribution was to implement the district plan. Unlike the BSP response, the WSP tried to connect his role to contributing to technology access. Again, though, there was a lack of vision from both principals on how to contribute to technology access.

My Reflection on Principal Contribution to Technology Access

After listening to the BSP during the interview, I was shocked that he did not understand what the significance of his role as the leader of the building was and how his role contributed to technology. I did not hear a vision of technology usage for the students and teachers in the LIB urban high school except for the day-to-day operation. The BSP's lack of vision was surprising to me considering he mentioned that he was a part of the technology implementation for this district in the past. Even with limited devices and no 1:1 device program, this should have caused the BSP to create a plan for the LIB urban high school on how he could get this building moving toward more access

to technology and becoming a 1:1 school even if the students could not take the devices home.

Unlike the BSP, the WSP appeared to have a plan that involved other school administrators contributing to technology access. He stated that he contributed by ensuring students had updated devices and wireless access. His statement confirmed to me that he took part in the planning of adding wireless access points in the high school and helped to determine the devices students used in school. Even though the WSP did not think he contributed to the technology access, he did. It was unfortunate however that he did not realize how important a principal's role could be in technology access.

In conclusion, I was surprised at the limited knowledge the BSP and the WSP had regarding the district technology plan. With their lack of district knowledge on the technology plan, I wondered how the principals could be visionaries at the building level and how what they were doing supported the district technology plan. Furthermore, I was shocked that both principals did not realize the importance of their role in implementing technology in the schools and maintaining the use of it.

Discussion of Maintaining Technology Access in The Building

The next question for the two principals was related to maintaining the technology access in the building. The BSP replied that the technology for students at the school was maintained at a couple different levels:

We tried to ensure students had access to computers, which gave them access to the internet and access to information and knowledge. In addition, we tried to make sure that each of our classrooms had an adequate number of computers. In this school, an adequate amount of computers was a classroom set of thirty. We rotated the classroom set of computers that were stored in instructional mobile units that contain individual computers such as iPads, chromebooks, or laptops. The teachers signed those out or students can actually sign those out. Some students

were allowed to take the computer devices home because students do work outside of school.

The BSP said the teachers had two types of computer devices in the classroom. Those devices were a laptop and a desktop computer. He continued discussing how the school tried to make sure students did not experience barriers while in school due to the limited access to technology, as well as providing the students access even when they were outside of school with technology-based activities. The BSP said, “A lot of our teachers identified a certain type of technology that they may need, that they feel was beneficial to the students.” He explained to me that together with the teacher it was an attempt to figure out ways to get additional technology resources for teachers through grants or Donors Choose. Unlike the BSP, the WSP replied:

I thought it may sound simple, but I thought the easiest way to maintain access was anytime there was anything to troubleshoot, we responded. An assistant principal was specifically in charge of being a technology liaison. An example was a person being locked out of student information system because he/she could not remember the password or with learning management system. When you have someone with the knowledge and the ability to know how to reset those things, it was huge because we did not have the delay or all the levels of departments to go through to get the access for our students. We had to make sure that when access for any reason was denied, we had a way to break down that barrier and fix it.

The WSP mentioned there were some things the school could not fix at the building level and had to communicate with the IT department at the district level. The WSP expressed that it seemed like things that had been barriers in the past had led to conversations about how to streamline those things. The WSP thought the more chances that you gave teachers for the opportunity to use technology the more they realized the convenience of technology. This year he said technology issues were not necessarily with the students but with the teachers.

In the focus group, the BSP and the WSP talked about maintaining access off campus. The BSP said, “For us, we did have a pretty decent size representation of families who struggled with having that type of technology that connected to our academy.” The WSP said that the school had four academies, business and finance, engineering, advanced manufacturing and logistics as well as an information technology academy. The BSP shared that because of the of technology resources, the school had collaborated with some of the businesses in the community that donated funds to purchase the Wifi devices. The BSP mentioned the school had to scale back because it was going to be too much money to provide as a 1:1 device. There were 300 students and he was focusing on the freshman group and those families that did not have that type of technology access at home. The BSP shared that the majority of the students who had a cell phone were able to find access points around the city.

In conclusion, there were similarities and difference between the LIW and LIB urban high schools on maintaining technology access. One similarity was the LIB and LIW had particular individuals to help with rotating and assisting with devices. There were several differences between the urban high schools. First, the White high school had a designated school administrator whose responsibility was to make sure that students had Chromebooks. At the African American high school, the administrator did not clearly mention a person within the building who maintained technology equipment. In addition, the BSP said, “A lot of our teachers will identify a certain type of technology that they may need; that they feel was beneficial to the students.” He explained that they attempted to figure out ways to get additional technology resources for teachers through grants or Donors Choose. The BSP said that the LIB urban high school had to scale back on the

purchase of technology unlike the WSP who did not mention anything like that for the school.

My Reflection on Maintaining Technology Access in The Building

After listening to the BSP's short response to the question, I continued to feel that he was not deeply involved in the technology access or he lacked the knowledge to answer the question as a leader of the building. It was clear that there was not a building technology maintenance plan because he used the word 'we' and had limited details of the process. In addition, he said that the school had to scale back on the technology purchasing which was confusing when the school was not 1:1 and there seemed to be a lack of technology usage by students. Based on my interview with the BSP on technology needs, I interpreted that the teachers knew the best types of technology to use in the classroom to engage students in learning. Again, it appeared during the interview that the BSP lacked the knowledge on how technology access was maintained in the school. Based on my interview with the BSP on internet access, I interpreted that there were significant numbers of students' families that were having a difficult time connecting to school technology links. This confirmed to me that the BSP had a lack of vision and connection to this school.

Unlike the BSP, the WSP was able to provide detailed information on the person who was assigned to maintain the technology access in the school. He was also able to share with me that some issues could not be fixed at the school level but at the district office. This reaffirmed to me that the WSP was aware of how to maintain technology access for students and teachers. In addition, the WSP appeared to communicate with the administrator in his building frequently to provide me with examples of issues the school

had during the school year. The WSP displayed a sense of urgency to fix technology issues and he displayed a desire to make sure students did not miss educational activities because of technology issues.

Discussion of the Teacher and Student Expectation of Technology Usage

The next question was based on the expectations for teachers and students to use technology in the classroom. The BSP said, “It was a well-known expectation for teachers to use technology in the classroom.” The BSP continued saying it was the way of the world today and it was how students operated and manipulated the world. He further stated that they were asking students to produce projects, assignments, reports, research, and so on:

Those days of encyclopedias and visiting your local library were long gone so the access to the internet really gives the students an easier and quicker access to producing quality work. The teachers had to have an understanding that there were expectations for students to have access to that technology.

In the BSP’s school, additional evidence of the use of technology in the classroom was the process teachers used to checkout computer devices. In the BSP’s school there was an adequate number of computers which included a classroom set of 30 devices. He shared that they did rotate the classroom set of computers, and that they were stored in instructional mobile units that contained individual computers such as iPads, Chromebook, or laptops. The teachers signed those out or students signed those out. Unlike the BSP, the WSP’s school was 1:1 which meant all students were issued a school device at the beginning of the school year.

The WSP said, “I thought there was a borderline between the normal teaching expectations and teachers who go beyond what was expected in the classrooms, I guess.” The WSP talked about how there were some classrooms that he visited in the building to

see if there were less teachers lecturing because of the use of technology access for students. The WSP shared the example of having a substitute teacher and knowing the students were trained on the LMS and the expectations of where to get the bell work, where to access what is going on for the day, and where to access the assessments for the day through the LMS. He said, “The teachers who combined direct instruction with technology I thought were the ones who had the greatest level of success.” The WSP shared there were many teachers who for the first time since the implementation of the LMS started to branch out and did things even if it was just e-learning days. The WSP still thought there was a lot of room to grow. He compared it to an online college course where you rarely talked face-to-face or over the phone or ever met your professor, but you were in constant communication via technology. The WSP believed that educators did not want to get to the point where the students did not know who was teaching the classes. The WSP believed the staff could definitely do a better job of educating the students at their ability levels and meeting them where they were through their technology.

The WSP continued saying that many of the students probably went home and played Fortnite or did something in some type of gaming atmosphere that was not just playing the game. The students were actually online with other teenagers with their headsets on, communicating, and using different technology. He said, “This type of activity would be nice if we could eventually try to tap into their ability to do that and maybe have the students learn things outside of the context in which they’re taught and realize that they’re actually learning them.” The WSP thought technology was a great tool for providing an environment for students to learn outside of school. He shared the

teachers were a little slow in developing that. From the initial interviews with the WSP and the BSP, it was clear that both principals had high expectations of technology.

During the focus group, the BSP and the WSP talked about the expectations of technology for teachers and students. The BSP said, “I thought the expectation was teachers were required to use the LMS.” He mentioned that he did a lot of communicating through Schoology in terms of requiring the teachers with upload their lesson plans in certain folders. Students and parents had access to both Schoology and Power School. Power School was the system where grades were uploaded. The BSP said that he often received comments from the teachers who thought the expectation of using technology tools was too much and burdensome for them. For example, in 2017 the BSP school district used E School as a student information system. Recently, the school district had switched from E School to Power School. The last three years the school district had been using Schoology. The BSP shared he had constant dialogue with teachers regarding the purpose of technology and the required professional communication with students and parents. The other ancillary technology tool the teachers were to use was Naviance Review 360, which was a behavior modification tracking type system. The BSP thought it was important to not overload teachers with all the different types of the technologies.

The BSP continued by saying, “What’s not monitored is ... what’s expected is what’s monitored, and if it’s not monitored, they will not do it except for the bare minimum.” He was thinking in terms of the evaluation system, there were expectations for the teachers to use the technology in a way that was beneficial in the classroom as

well as a communication piece with students' families. The BSP shared that there was nothing connected to the evaluation system with technology.

The WSP said his school district LMS was also Schoology. He informed the other participant that when the district piloted Schoology it did not sync well with the student information system (SIS). Many of the teachers were doing double grade entry. Therefore, the teachers were required to enter grades in the student information center because that was the location parents looked to for their child's grades and the school report cards were printed from this software. The WSP mentioned that this year the IT department was able to connect the SIS and LMS. This connection was a significant help as they tried very hard to do this organically. He shared with the BSP that several school staff visited another school that adopted Schoology. The WSP mentioned the district was going to start forcing some of the teachers to do it and they realized there would be resistance. The WSP shared how teachers used an LMS to provide students other ways of learning besides direct instruction. The principal shared there were many teachers who for the first time since the implementation of the LMS were starting to branch out and do things even if it was just on e-learning days.

The WSP talked about how his school had veteran teachers who never even created a user name and password. He said,

I walk into his classroom for walk-throughs now, and I saw Schoology used almost every day. Schoology had become organic, but it definitely was something that I thought once our students hold our teachers accountable and when our teachers see there was some level of convenience.

He thought that ultimately technology did help in terms of their academic performance.

He continued to say he thought that the students had a greater chance at being successful if it was something that was readily present to them every day and then they got that

immediate feedback. The school administrators required every teacher to log in to the LMS and use it. The WSP expressed the school was not quite where he would like it to be with the use of the LMS and a resource in their classrooms, but it was a start. He further explained that he tried to make sure that increasing access was not limiting the things that caused people to give up on it.

During the focus group, the BSP told the group his school was not 1:1. He said that he did not allow the students to bring their own devices; at least he did not observe the students with their own devices. The reason he did not allow students to bring their own devices was he never knew what was on there. The BSP explained that students did airdropping when they brought their cell phones or devices. The students had to use the devices in instructional mobile units. He said teachers could check the mobile units out for classroom use. If teachers did not want to check out the instructional mobile carts, teachers could sign up to use one of the four computer labs. The WSP followed up saying, "We are 1:1. And typically it has not been a problem." He shared there were things in the district that had been invested in to make sure that internet capability and access were not going to be issues.

Also in the focus group, the WSP said to the BSP that he had so many teachers who realized there was a level of convenience, even with the assessments grading. There was instant feedback that they received and then it was posted directly into the gradebook, which communicated with the SIS. The WSP shared the teachers knew there was some work on the front end to get all those items uploaded in the LMS, but then once the items were uploaded the teachers could tweak each system. The WSP mentioned that teachers spent a lot of time creating lesson plans and importing activities in the LMS for

the first time, but only needed to update the activities as needed each semester. The WSP shared that the teachers who did not use it were getting frustrated because they were forced to use learning management in every other class because of students' comments. He shared that the student pressure was "a nice kind of shift in our culture." The WSP commented to the BSP that he "hit the nail on the head" and it was not just with technology, but what was monitored was done. The WSP shared that one of the things that as an administrator he had to do was to be up to date and knowledgeable about what his teachers had access to and how it could be a resource.

The WSP shared in 2018 the staff was required to have a lesson plan submission every other week. Before he became principal of the school, the teachers placed their lesson plan book on their desk and the administrators had a two-week window where they physically walked into the room to review the lesson plans. He expressed that walking into teachers' rooms was very time consuming, so he decided to have an electronic submission via email, and then ultimately through Schoology. The WSP created a course in Schoology that all staff members were enrolled in just as their students would be in their course. Every other week the staff members would log in to Schoology and upload their lesson plans. This allowed the administrators a common place to go in, review those plans, and then have dialogue back and forth with teachers. He did mention the fear teachers had about technology. For example, he believed that educators did not want to get to the point where the students did not know who was teaching the classes. The WSP mentioned that students helped to integrate technology in the classroom. The students were questioning teachers who were not using the LMS and comparing classes with those who were using it.

In conclusion, there were similarities and differences of technology expectations with devices in the classroom and the availability of technology in the LIW and LIB urban high schools. Both the WSP and the BSP shared that teachers were using technology in the classrooms because it was an expectation. During the focus group, both principals expanded their expectations of teachers using technology in the classroom. The BSP commented that, “It was the way of the world today and it was how students operate and manipulate the world.” The WSP shared that it was also an expectation for the teachers to use technology in the classroom. For example, the WSP shared that he was having the teachers submit their biweekly lesson plan via the LMS as an assignment. Teachers submitted their lesson plans in the LMS as opposed to just emailing them or taking a picture of their planning book and sending it to their evaluator. The BSP mentioned that he did a lot of communicating through Schoology in terms of requiring the teachers to submit lesson plans in certain folders.

Regarding differences, the WSP mentioned that the teachers used the technology to a point where students could continue their work on the LMS despite having a substitute teacher in the classroom. Another difference was the BSP did not say anything in the individual interview about how communication between teachers and students increased with Schoology. Unlike the BSP, the WSP mentioned how teachers used the LMS to assign lessons and message students about schoolwork. The students had the ability to be connected with the teachers to send a message or ask a question or ask for help via LMS.

My Reflection on Teacher and Student Expectation of Technology Usage

After listening to the responses of the BSP in the individual and group interview, it was clear that technology expectations in the classrooms were limited with Schoology and devices. In the individual interview, the BSP did not talk much about the expectations of using the devices and Schoology in the classrooms. It appeared that teachers were expected to do the daily operations through technology such as checking emails and uploading lesson plans, but nothing more. Based on the interview with the BSP on teacher expectation, I interpreted that teachers had been informed several times of the expectations about using technology in the classroom. This was surprising to me when the BSP made a comment about what gets monitored gets done. I thought at that moment that he must not monitor his basic expectations to develop more expectations to increase technology usage in the classrooms with teachers and students. I found it odd that the BSP talked more about expectations in the focus group with the WSP. It gave me the impression that he may be reflecting on my individual interview with him. However, his answers still did not disclose how the expectations of technology were monitored to maintain the expectations. It appeared during the interview that the BSP was concerned with the misuse of technology and how teachers thought there was too much technology. I was perplexed with both because if students knew the expectations and consequences, then there should not be a focus on the negativity of student use of technology that prevented use in the building. Another concern I had about the BSP was that he mentioned teachers being overwhelmed with technology. This means to me that he had not done a good job with explaining the purpose of devices, Schoology or PowerSchool, at the building level.

In contrast, the WSP answered the teacher expectations question with more detail. I was impressed, compared to the BSP, that the WSP had a task for teachers to complete in Schoology. This action showed me that the WSP was attempting to be intentional about exposing the teachers to Schoology to help them understand how to use it and how the students used it. The WSP was enthusiastic when he talked about how he expected teachers to use Schoology to submit their lesson plans and how this helped the teachers to develop a course in Schoology for their classes. Based on the interview with the WSP on expectations of technology, I interpreted that the teachers who use technology for part instruction and direct instruction for the other part had success with students learning in the classes. I was impressed with how he compared classrooms that used technology to classrooms that did not as it related to student engagement. Again, this gave me the impression that he was continuing to be intentional about expectations being maintained in the classroom, as well as integration of technology in the classroom for teachers and student to be engaged. It appeared that he wanted to figure out how to decrease worksheets and paperback books and increase more technology-driven learning because the students were used to technology for socializing. I thought the WSP was aware of the benefits of teachers using technology in the classroom to engage students because he mentioned how students complained about the teachers who still used worksheets. The WSP appeared to know who the teachers were that met the technology expectations to plan how to expand their knowledge and work with the other teachers who were not meeting expectations.

In conclusion, I was disappointed that the BSP did not clearly demonstrate how he monitored the teachers to determine if technology was being used with students. I got the

impression that he did not set the vision for technology expectations for the building. The BSP appeared to let the teachers drive how technology was used in the classrooms even with the expectations that technology should be used in the classrooms. I was impressed that the WSP had a vision and a short-term plan of how to increase the use of technology in the classroom by requiring the teachers to use it. In addition, the students putting pressure on the teachers to use Schoology more than worksheets seemed effective. The WSP said he walked in the classrooms to monitor the level of engagement with technology. This gave me the impression that he was not just ‘checking the box’ that technology exists in the school, but he was engaged in the implementation.

Discussion of Relation Technology Access to School State Accountability Grade

The final question was based on the relationship of the state school accountability grade and technology access. The BSP replied, “I thought in a lot of ways the state school accountability grade probably missed the mark when it comes to the technology piece.” He explained that technology was a tool used to demonstrate knowledge and he did not see how it was reflected in the accountability grade. Unlike the BSP, the WSP replied, “As far as technology, I guess that was tied to the test. I mean, the test had technology-enhanced questions.” Not only were teachers trying to teach the students how to answer the questions that were math or language arts related, but educators had to teach the students how to answer the questions, drag and drop, where they entered their answer, and if they had multiple parts to the question, to answer all of the parts. The participant shared that the staff tried to replicate those testing application skills with technology. He expressed that since the school did not have 1:1 and rarely had students on devices, his guess was that the students were taking the state assessment on paper not on computers

because of the lack of exposure. He explained, “I thought educators were doing a disservice by always assigning academic work being on paper instead of blended with technology.” In another school district he worked in, he shared it was not 1:1, and students always did paper pencil state assessments.

Unfortunately, the BSP explained that technology was a tool used to demonstrate knowledge and he did not see how it had been reflected in the accountability grade. He said, “I thought in a lot of ways the state school accountability grade probably does not show evidence of technology skills.” In contrast, the WSP connected accountability to the test by having technology-enhanced questions.

In conclusion, the similarity between urban high schools directed by the BSP and the WSP was the exposure to technology and how to demonstrate mastery of state standards. The BSP further stated that they were asking students to produce projects, assignments, reports, research, and so on, to expose students to technology. The LIW urban high school students were provided technology enhanced activities throughout the school year to expose them on to how to use the tools to demonstrate knowledge. The difference was that the BSP shared that the state accountability did not acknowledge technology in the schools. In contrast, the WSP saw the technology embedded in the assessment the students took to demonstrate mastery of grade level standards.

My Reflection on Relation Technology Access to School State Accountability Grade

After listening to the BSP, I determined from his answers that he was not aware of how technology usage for students affected how they were able to demonstrate the knowledge of the state standards on the state assessment. The BSP said he did not see how technology and the state accountability connected to the overall school letter grade. I

was shocked by that comment because the assessment for students was computer-based. I continued to be disappointed because of computer-based assessment and the BSP's lack of motivation to figure out how to integrate more technology in the classrooms along with teachers using direct instruction. I thought he would be motivated to tell me that he would integrate technology tools in the math or English classes for exposure before testing. Even in the focus group, the BSP did not acknowledge the technology tools that students needed to be exposed to during the school year. This confirmed to me that the BSP lacked the technology connection to educational assessment knowledge as a building level leader.

In contrast, the WSP was able to provide me with examples of how students were exposed to the technology tools that were similar to the state assessment. Based on the interview with the WSP on technology, I interpreted that he knew that technology-enhanced questions were on the state assessment. I was impressed that the WSP acknowledged the connection between technology, the state assessment, and the student performances on the state assessment. He thought that the students' performance on the state assessment contributed to the overall letter grade from the state. The WSP appeared to have limited knowledge of technology terminology of assessments to explain what occurred at the building level. The WSP appeared more willing than the BSP to make sure students were prepared regarding how to use the technology tools before the state assessment.

Overall, there was a 1:1 device program at the LIW urban high school unlike the African American urban high school. The teachers had technology carts to check out for students to use laptops. The White urban high school utilized Schoology to increase

student engagement in learning content, access to courses, and for teachers to submit lesson plans. The LIW urban high school principal talked about how students could communicate to their teachers more in the LMS for help because of the 24 hours/7 days a week access. The LIB urban high school used Schoology for teachers to upload lesson plans. The LIW urban high school used technology to prepare students on how to take an assessment on a computer and learn content through an online class.

Graduation Rate by Schools

Both the BSP and the WSP have been high school administrators for several years. Graduation data that were provided from the district office were shared with both principals during the interview. Tables 14 and 15 summarize the graduation rate from each high school over two years. The graduation categories were fourth-year and fifth-year graduation rate. The fourth-year graduation points were determined by how many students completed high school in four years with the cohort that started their freshmen year. The group of students who completed high school a year after their cohort graduated high school determined the fifth-year graduation points. As seen in Table 14, in the LIB there was an increase of 10.4 points from 2015-2016 to 2016-2017 for four years. The overall graduation rate increased 13.1% from 2015-2016 to 2016-2017 with the additional points for fifth-year graduation points. In contrast, the LIW urban high school had a 9.9 point decrease in fourth-year graduation points. The overall graduation rate decreased 9.7% from 2015-2016 to 2016-2017. Despite the LIB urban high school's higher overall graduation rate percent, it was still significantly lower than the LIW urban high school. In 2015-2016, the LIB urban high school graduation rate was 33.8% lower than the LIW urban high school. Also, in 2016-2017, the LIB urban high school

graduation rate was 11.1% lower than the LIW urban high school. The WSP mentioned in the interview that the only reason the 2016-2017 graduation decreased was due to the lack of appropriate withdrawal paperwork at the building level.

Table 14. Urban High School Graduation Rate

| Graduation Rate | LIB | | LIW | |
|-------------------------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|
| | 2015-2016 | 2016-2017 | 2015-2016 | 2016-2017 |
| 4 Year Grad. Points | 55.0 | 65.4 | 88.3 | 78.4 |
| 5 Year Grad. Points | 0 | 2.7 | 0.5 | 0.7 |
| Overall Graduation Rate | 55.0% | 68.1% | 88.8% | 79.1% |

Interview Results on Graduation Rate

In this section, there are four areas each followed by my response to what the two principals said. The four areas are 1) general discussion of graduation rate, 2) discussion of maintaining and improving the graduation rate, 3) discussion of the reasons students do not earn their diploma, and 4) discussion of relationship between graduation rate and school grade.

General Discussion of the Evaluation of Graduation Rate

The first question to the BSP and the WSP was based on their contribution or support of students graduating from their high school. The BSP said he impacted students graduating in a major way, “As the school leader, it was my job to make sure that I knew where every student was with regards to the graduation pathway and if the student was on track to graduate on time.” He further explained that he needed to ensure that all the other departments, including content area teaching departments, counseling, and the social worker were working in tandem to ensure students attained what they needed so they could graduate on time. Unlike the BSP, the WSP said:

There were a number of ways. Three years ago, an in-school half-day alternative program for students to earn credits at an accelerated rate through a software program was implemented in the school. The school

also collaborated with the career center as another location for students to recovery credits. The career center had credit recovery classes that took place every period of the day for students that may be one or two credits behind.

The WSP continued to explain that if students were significantly behind in credits they were usually identified for either the alternative program or the credit recovery program at the career center. Another partnership with the career center was the adult education program. He shared that students withdrew from the high school and registered at the career center to earn a high school diploma. The career center was an option for students to take a number of classes and ultimately graduate with a high school diploma. The WSP shared, "It was important no matter when students graduated, but that they graduated." He said he preferred to have the students within their cohort count for accountability when they graduated, but if they could not, even if it was fifth or sixth year or even later, anyone graduating was a bonus to him.

The WSP revealed he had done a number of things related to working with the counselors and the administrators through some online offerings the school had for students where seat time was not a requirement in the state anymore. The school had the ability to do some things online that could be in addition to a seven period day or half-day. For example, the WSP said a half-day was provided in the alternative online learning program. The benefit of the program was the student continued to have access to the online classes after completing the half-day. The WSP shared a major success was changing the teachers mindset of credit recovery not only being available to students during the school day. He said:

The school staff were able to change the access for credit recovery classes a couple of years ago for students to have 24/7 access who may work directly after school or may work during the day or some parts of the day. So, my thought sitting here and looking at all the barriers that exist for

students to graduate, we were directly responsible for trying to meet the students where they were and break down those barriers, but the ultimate goal was getting them to graduate.

The WSP felt that seeing the graduation rate and the number of students graduating increasing was one of his greatest accomplishments in a short amount of time. In the focus group, the WSP expressed:

When I first arrived here, we got our first letter grade the first semester, which was obviously for time before I officially took over and our graduation rate was below 90 percent. Therefore, I went into the cohort to determine the issues. At that time, the school could not make any appeals or any changes.

The WSP shared after reviewing his cohort report that the first three students he saw who dinged the school were foreign exchange students who were not exited properly at the end of their year with the high school. Those three students could have increased the graduation percentage to 90% and then the school letter grade would have gone from a C to a B, but the school missed the opportunity. The WSP informed the group that he had instant conversations with his team and found out that several of the staff on his team did not know about the cohort report, where to print it, or the purpose of a cohort report. The WSP explained that the exit codes were very important. He gave an example to the focus group of when a student was withdrawing from school the student had to be exited off the cohort properly so it would not count as a dropout. The WSP continued saying if you did not monitor that cohort each year that it was difficult to locate the student again to complete the paperwork for them to be properly exited off the cohort. He shared that his school had to make some policy changes about the process of enrolling and exiting students at the building level. The WSP talked about how the school experienced a graduation rate audit the previous year:

The school had a high mobility. During the audit, the school had 160 students selected that we had to provide withdrawal documentation on proving the students exited the school correctly. According to the standards that the state had set, we had several students that did not meet the expectation with their exit documentation. The school ended up going from a 93, 94-graduation rate down to a 78 percent graduation rate because of insufficient documentation. This was a very hard pill to swallow, a very hard conversation to have with our board and our community, but ultimately it opened our eyes to some practices that were being done in previous years that we needed to fix.

The WSP said he put some new things in place, and the high school recovered after the graduation audit. The school was back up to 94%, but he expressed that just having the knowledge in general of how the graduation rate was calculated was very important. Lastly, the WSP informed the focus group that if a student earned enough credits and was to a point where they might be able to graduate, they had no problem developing a contract for the student to re-enroll. He said, “It was constant monitoring and knowing all of those interventions were there and working with our teachers and especially our counselors.” The WSP shared that there were tough conversations to have with parents, but he tried to get students on a track of potentially being successful instead of not being honest and all of a sudden getting to a point where it was just too late. The WSP mentioned that his parents had been receptive to that, and it had proven successful for the school.

My Reflection on Evaluation of Graduation Rate

After listening to the BSP talk briefly about the contribution or supports to the students graduating high school, I was disappointed with his lack of involvement in the process of students graduating from high school. It appeared from his short answer that he was involved in supporting students in graduating from high school but he did not provide details of what that looked like. Based on the interview with the BSP on the

graduation rate, I interpreted that he thought it was his job to know the every current senior student graduation status and if the student was on track to graduate. I only could assume that he was not that deeply involved in the process of supporting students earning their high school diploma because of the lack of details in the conversation. I was expecting the BSP to have an essential role in the supports for students to graduate from high school because he previously mentioned in the interview that he wanted to work in a school similar to where he attended and wanted to give back. This was disturbing to me considering this is a LIB urban high school and the graduation rate is not equal or better than the LIW urban high school.

Unlike the BSP, the WSP provided details of his involvement in the student graduation process. It was good to hear how he felt he was involved, how he made sure other staff understood their role, and how it contributed to students graduating and the overall graduation rate. I was impressed by this level of involvement of tracking the data to make sure the graduation report was correct. Even though the monitoring of students in and out of a high school was the school registrar's responsibility, the involvement of the WSP showed me his level on commitment to make sure the data were correct. In addition, I observed from the WSP's tone and body language during the conversation on the graduation rate data that he took it seriously and cared about the data. Based on the interview with the WSP on when students graduated, I interpreted that to him it did not matter if the student graduated within four years, but that they graduated with a high school diploma at the some point in life. He cared about the students graduating as well and that was evident by the various educational options he supported in the school.

Discussion of Strategies Used to Sustain or Improve the Graduation Rate

The next question was based on the strategies used to sustain or improve the graduation rate. The BSP discussed several strategies that he had implemented to sustain or improve the graduation rate. One of the strategies was the use of the success agent person hired by the school district to monitor students' process in classes. He explained the success agent role was a teacher or a classified person who had an interest in helping, impacting, supporting, and guiding students throughout their high school career, particularly during their junior and senior years. The BSP said, "The success agent created a checklist of tasks he/she had to complete with each student including a weekly conversation with those students pertaining to graduation." The BSP said the conversation with the success agent could also be the student discussing social-emotional or academic barriers in the classroom.

In addition, the success agent and school counselor discussed with the student the different graduation tracks, the graduation track the student was on, grade point averages (GPAs), college scholarships, and college applications. Based on the BSP's comments on the success agent role in the school, this position was an integral part of communicating key requirements with students about earning credits to graduate on time. He said before students were connected to the success agent, "the students looked like they knew about graduating high school, but really they needed a lot of guidance just to manipulate what it was in terms of graduating high school and moving on to life after high school."

The BSP said, "The biggest thing was just making sure that students understood their status in regards to the requirements to graduate." He discussed this was the reason why there were town hall meetings several times with seniors, juniors, and sophomores. In fact, freshmen town halls were specifically on what it takes to graduate. The BSP said

he used this phrase, “We had a push here for four years and out. It’s called four years and go.” In the freshmen academy town hall, the BSP said he informed the students “we do not want to see you any more than four years.”

He explained further, the school district created a freshman academy for students to be teamed up with the same teachers throughout the entire year:

Those teachers met together to talk about the students and who were not being successful and then figuring out ways to bring in interventions to get them back on track. In addition, there were town hall meetings with all grade levels, senior graduation meetings with parents, and one-on-one meetings with seniors’ parents. In the meetings, the counselors discussed with the parents the graduation tracks, if the student’s status was on the graduation track, and the areas the student needed to accomplish. Also in the meetings the parents had the opportunity to add input.

The BSP shared the example of the counselor asking the parent if there was anything going on that the school staff needed to know about in order to connect the family to community resources to help them through any difficult times. The ultimate goal was to support the student while earning a high school diploma.

The BSP mentioned classes as another strategy used to help students graduate on time from high school. He said:

We had several support classes that were called lab or remedial classes to help students who had not been successful on the state’s exams. In these classes, the teachers provided the students extra academic help in language arts and algebra. These classes were scheduled for students to attend every day during the school day.

The teacher was able to help the students daily compared to one day a week after school.

The BSP said that it was very difficult to provide students remedial classes or tutoring after school because of family situations. Another strategy was ‘boot camps’ for students.

The ‘boot camps’ were conducted two to three weeks in a class period right before the state assessment to ensure teachers covered all the standards the students were going to

be tested on and the students were prepared for the assessment. This information led the BSP to speak about another strategy used to support students in earning their high school diploma called credit recovery. The credit recovery classes were “offered to help students catch up on credits, retake failed classes, or retake classes for higher grades.”

A different type of strategy mentioned was mentors from the community. The BSP said, “Most of the students did not need to take recovery classes or remedial classes, but needed a mentor to support them through the high school process until graduation.” The mentors were from the neighborhood businesses, city-wide businesses, and community areas as opposed to someone who was already working in the school with the community mentor partnership. The BSP said the school was always trying to identify and take ideas from the community on how together the school and community could help positively impact the graduation rate.

In contrast to the BSP, the WSP discussed that he thought one strategy was the counselors and administrators needed to be on the same page with their students who were at risk to not graduate. “At-risk” students were those who were not on track to graduate on time with their peers. He shared that counselors were doing a very good job of having continuous grade level communication with students. The WSP explained the communication with counselors included internal checkpoints when they analyzed and determined if an intervention was needed for students. The intervention options included a class period of credit recovery or multiple periods of credit recovery in alternative placement. Another option was the alternative setting could be a half day at the career center in the credit recovery program. The last option was the adult program to earn their high school diploma. The WSP thought the greatest things that the school staff had done

was having honest conversations with families and students about the graduation status, explaining that there was still a light at the end of the tunnel, increasing the academic supports, and making changes to the students' schedules.

The WSP reflected and talked about the alternative program that had been implemented for three years. He said he could not think of any time where there were conversations with families about the alternative program being considered a form of punishment. The WSP said, "Now, while there had been a behavior that's caused him to look at that as possible interventions, it had never been packaged to our families and students as a punishment, but an opportunity." In contrast to the negative perception, the students who were in the alternative program did not want to leave because they had seen some level of success. The students who selected to leave the program still had a desire for some their classes to be online. The WSP continued saying he thought the students wanting to try the alternative classes made all the difference in the world, or at least gave them a chance of buying in to it to experience some success. The WSP thought all alternative programs and academic supports were encompassed in trying to get the graduation rate as high as possible. At the same time, he said the counselors tried to meet the students where they were academically and provide them with a variety of options in which they could be successful.

Another strategy he shared was about the students who left, withdrew, and went to the adult program. The WSP said, "As the school administration, I wrote agreements that state if the student earned X number of credits I allowed them to come back, finish with us, and walk across our stage." The WSP explained that he put that student's name on his calendar for a date and time for him to check back in with the student to see if

he/she was doing what they needed to. In turn, the WSP said he would allow them to return to the school if the students held up their end of the bargain. The WSP said the parents appreciated that school staff did not talk down to them during this process. He reiterated the parents appreciated that the school staff was not telling or painting the picture that their child was dumb or stupid or could not do it. The principal sighed:

Life happens! Many of our students in an urban environment were working. Many of our students were taking care of younger siblings. Education was just not the top priority and we got that at this high school. The question was, so where can we meet them to make education more of a priority?

The WSP said another strategy was the online offerings. He revealed that one of the problems the school encountered was when they asked students to do things strictly online. It became easy for them to forget about it because the student was not logging in doing those assignments and checking messages online. Because of this being an issue, he was able to put some contract language in place with the students where they had to be online a certain number of hours a day and/or week. If the student was not logging in and completing assignments, then that particular online intervention might be removed and the student would be placed in a face-to-face class or an alternative setting. He said, “When you are working all the time and your attendance was horrible in school, but you were a pretty smart kid, it appeared that like just working online would work.” The WSP thought online learning should be an option for the students who can academically handle it.

The WSP shared the school had some success stories where students were very committed and did well online. He mentioned initially the struggle for the school staff was offering the online courses as an intervention because it was usually a last resort. The WSP said that the priority was to get the courses completed and that did not usually come

right away. Therefore, the WSP tried a number of different options that he felt had been successful. The WSP shared the school had been supported by the district administration office, and the school staff had been supported by the parents. In the past, if the student was not making it in the high school the prior building administration would kick the student out of high school. As the WSP was ending his thought, he shared “We try to find different ways for them to learn.”

In the focus group, the BSP and the WSP talked about the strategies to keep students on track to graduate. The BSP said, “Actually, we meet weekly on ours because it’s so transient, just so transiently but constantly getting seniors in from everywhere.” He said that he did not see the students again for months, if ever, and this was why monitoring all four cohorts on a regular basis was important. He shared how the seniors needed to be monitored weekly. The WSP said, “You never knew about that cohort group, the senior group.” He informed the focus group that he had a status board in his conference office where every senior’s name was on the board, and with the counseling staff they wrote all types of different notes next to those names.

The WSP said that he met with the staff in that conference room to discuss each of these senior’s progress, the classes that may cause students not to graduate, and how the students did or did not access additional help from the social workers, counselors, and the administration. The WSP mentioned these meetings and conversations were a top priority with their senior teachers who were very caring people, very understanding, and constantly asking, ‘What else can we do?’ the BSP said in order to support students to earn their diploma he tried to look at what else could be done. The BSP said he told his

staff, “We were just as much as a part of the students graduating and we had a role to play, but the students had a very big role to play too.”

The BSP told the focus group that he had a graduation coach. All the high schools had graduation coaches, and their sole responsibility was to lead or work alongside the registrar, to identify the barriers and make sure that the cohorts were current. He continued sharing that this required tracking down paperwork, making home visits, going to find the students, signing the homeschool release, working with the registrar to get the required paperwork from sending schools, and updating the state mobility report. The graduation coach role had many arduous tasks including trying to track down some students who had not been seen in two, three years, but it affected the graduation rate. The BSP said, “We had to put the work in, make sure that was done.”

In conclusion, there were many similarities and differences among the LIW and LIB urban high schools with strategies. One similar support provided by both schools was credit recovery courses. The credit recovery program gave students the opportunity to retake classes in which they had failed to earn credits. Another similar response to students earning their high school diplomas was that both school administrators said that the main reason why students did not earn their high school diplomas in four or five years were due to family issues. Those family issues were raising younger siblings, working to contribute to the family household, trauma within the family, lack of a mother and father, or being raised by grandparents.

There were significant differences in strategies used to help students graduate from high school as well. The majority of the LIB high school paired success agents and community mentors with junior and senior students. The high school administrator

conducted town hall meetings with each graduating class to share graduation requirements. The high school had a freshman academy to support the transition from middle to high school. In contrast, the majority LIW urban high school offered a variety of programs such as credit recovery, alternative programs, online courses, and adult education programs.

In addition, there were significant differences between the two administrators' understanding of why students did not earn their high school diploma in four or five years. The majority LIB urban high school administrator said it was because of students' lack in reading skills and the majority LIW urban high school administrator said it was the lack of motivation and family issues.

My Reflection on Strategies Used to Sustain or Improve the Graduation Rate

After listening to the BSP speak about the strategies used to support students in earning their high school diploma, I was impressed with the details at the high school level. The BSP was able to enlighten me on the role of the success agent and others in connection to students to keep them on track to graduate from high school. Based on the interview with the BSP on the success agent, I interpreted that the person met with the students weekly to talk about class requirements for graduation. I was impressed because he provided details on the strategies of other staff and the educational supports in the school. This showed me that he was invested in the strategies implemented in the school because he was making sure the staff were doing their jobs. This was evident to me because of how much he talked about the roles and educational supports for students. Based on the interview with the BSP on life after high school for student supports meant, I interpreted that the students knew what was required to graduate from high school, but

they were not aware of how to earn the credits and what it meant to transition to life after high school. Again, I was expecting some uniqueness for the LIB urban high school because of the graduation rate and the make-up of the student population.

Unlike the BSP, the WSP continued to provide details of the educational strategies and supports in the school. I continued to be amazed at the involvement level of the WSP regarding the type of supports offered at the school to help students earn their high school diploma. It appeared that the WSP was open to implementing a new strategy if it was going to help a student graduate. This was evident through the alternative programs offered at the school and the career center. I was awe-struck by the WSP's willingness to implement unique strategies to support the students and not just the typical strategies like before and after school tutoring. Based on the interview with the WSP on the support class for students who were behind in credits, I interpreted that students benefited from the lab classes during the day versus after school. In addition, I interpreted that the families and students viewed the alternative programs as a help to support students who were earning a high school diploma but were behind in credits. During the interview, I heard a serious tone in his voice on having different options for students to graduate from high school when they fall behind in earning credits. This serious tone let me know that this was personal to him and he truly wanted students to graduate with their cohort group. It appeared that the WSP wanted to continue to increase and maintain a high graduation rate and did not settle for what was expected for a LIW urban high school.

Discussion of the Reasons Students Do Not Earn Their High School Diploma in Four or Five Years

The next question related to the reasons why students did not earn their high school diploma in four or five years. The BSP expressed:

I think there were a lot of reasons that go into why a student could or did not earn their diplomas in four to five years. One of them was in an urban setting that I've been in, and I've seen a lot of the -- sort of the social encounters that often challenge those students and families and a lot of our families resort to survival mode.

The BSP said that sometimes survival mode did not mean earning a high school diploma. He continued to say, "Students did not look at a high school diploma as being the way out of a bad situation to better opportunities." The BSP continued to talk about how the school staff had to help the students maneuver those social challenges. An example the BSP mentioned was, "We had students who were homeless, they did not live with their parents, or they were transient. Many of the students lived from house to house." In the school, the BSP said, "We had a large number of students whose parent had been or either was incarcerated, living in either a foster situation or sort of family dynamic other than just a parent household." He shared another challenge about how the school had students with emotional and mental health challenges that inhibited them from attaining a high school diploma in four or five years. A last challenge was that the LIB urban high school had an inordinate number of students who were caught up either in the juvenile system or with the Department of Corrections, which also inhibited them from learning and earning their high school diplomas.

One academic reason identified by the BSP that students did not earn their high school diploma was the lack of learning and mastering skills. He said, "There were students at freshman year who were significantly below grade level in reading or who

lacked a lot of the prerequisite readability skills that they needed to be successful in high school level classes.” The teachers in the school were faced with trying to bridge that gap with the students and support them in understanding the material at the high school level. The BSP said, “The students’ academic gaps could be because of some teachers and administrators sort of missed the mark with what it took having the skills to educate students well.” He believed some teachers only know their content and could not connect it to students for understanding. The BSP said that students tried to maneuver their way through non-humanistic teachers to earn a high school diploma.

Unlike the BSP, the WSP expressed, “Well, the easiest thing to talk about was that not getting enough credits to earn a high school diploma. There were so many factors that go into why some students did not get enough credits to graduate.” He said he had heard most of the reasons before, but at the end of the day, he always thought there was a root cause of why a student may not necessarily be as motivated in school. It usually could be traced back to some level of trauma, and it typically was not a medical condition even though it could be. The WSP shared there was some trauma that had occurred probably in the student’s adolescent life where the value of education was just not something that was instilled in them.

The WSP continued saying it did not mean that they could not be successful. He thought that when a student realized on a daily basis the struggles of getting the next meal, having enough money to live, or working because the income supports the family made earning a high school diploma more difficult or to see clearly the value of education. The WSP shared that students might have to raise younger siblings or care for

an elder. For example, many students in high school lived with aunts, uncles, grandmas, grandpas, great grandmas, and great grandpas. The WSP said:

Well, those things did not happen without some level of trauma, and it did not mean that everybody had to come from a two-parent household where both parents went to college. When you had that level of trauma, I thought that school becomes that place that you felt like you were required to go to because of compulsory attendance laws.

The WSP believed if there was a disability income check or a check from social security, the student had to be enrolled in school in order to receive the monetary assistance. He said that many folks looked at education as being just a burden when dealing with trauma in life. The WSP clarified the phrase of education being a burden as it was just something students had to do. The WSP believed the school system sometimes had been a failure in terms of the consequences of not attending school. For example, trying to hold parents and students accountable could be a very slow process from when a school made a referral on a student to juvenile probation to the student being assigned a probation officer (PO) and a person to intervene to make sure that the student was in school. The WSP said the referral process to juvenile did not work quite that fast, and that was no fault of the school or probation, but he thought the students and parents could take advantage of the slow process on attendance violations.

The WSP said that was why the school staff tried to do as many things as they could to break the barriers for the student to continue to learn and still graduate. While taking classes online was a foreign concept to some veteran school educators, it was where schools and educators had to meet the learner of today. Even though there were many excuses as to why students dropped out or were homeschooled, the number one reason students withdrew to homeschool was to be on their own. The students realized that they were in a hole that was too big to get out of to earn a diploma. The school staff

tried very hard every day to make sure students realized the hole really was not that big. The WSP said the students did not think they could get out of it. The fortunate thing was the school staff would share with the students the research that showed the amount of money made over the course of their lifetime was significantly less if they did not obtain a high school diploma. He shared that actually doing the coursework to earn the credit was the major struggle. He shared that students were very intelligent in other ways, but the process of going to school and completing school became cumbersome to them.

In the focus group, the BSP and the WSP discussed trauma, too few credits, not living with the mother or father, and living with other relatives. They talked about similar issues even though the students' ethnicity was different. The WSP said, "I guess the reason we all said the same things as causes for students not graduating was because it's true." He thought the families, parents, guardians, and students appreciated a level of flexibility that they tried to have with them to earn their high school diploma. The WSP said that there are unfortunate things that happen in life and the value of education had not remained the same for the student. The WSP expressed:

I thought they could get to a point where they just feel like it is impossible for them to achieve, and I thought that transcends whether it is gender, race, or ethnicity. It tends to be the thing that we experience here in this city was that we put all these interventions in place. At the schools, there were conversations of different interventions to help a student earn a diploma. We tried hard never to go at the angle of you were a failure. It was just okay. We had to try something different. Let us do something different that I thought they would appreciate that.

The BSP shared that at the end of the day, they only had a small portion of the student's time to try to influence and convince them of the importance of an education while those outside factors and traumatic situations were constantly present in their daily lives. Unfortunately, the BSP thought that school just weighed too heavy for the students

and the easiest thing to do was to give up or not pursue education. The BSP thought the more times that school staff promoted student success it helped refocus the importance of an education. The BSP really thought the outside negative factors were probably going to be a battle that educators would be fighting as long as they were in this business. The BSP responded:

Yeah, I concurred with everything you said. I would say that I thought there was just an attack these days on the importance of education as it related to a standard or a quality, a particular quality of life that you want to live and the years to come post high school.

The BSP shared that many of his students were very materialistic. The BSP continued with examples related to how students saw the entertainers on social media that only showed easy routes to success on TV, and not the true reality of how their favorite entertainer had attained the success through dedication and a lot of hard work. The students only saw the finished product of the entertainer and not the effort or all the hard work that had gone into it. The BSP continued saying the students wanted to look just like Cardi B or Lil Wayne because they had a job, made some money, and shopped at Sax Fifth Avenue. Therefore, the students thought they were successful and had achieved success through materialistic things. The BSP commented that a lot of that came from what the WSP talked about on the value system. The BSP said, "I talked to my staff a lot about our students' new normalcy of what success looks like." The new normalcy was whatever these students see in their household becomes their norms, and some of them were trying to break through what they saw as their norms.

The BSP also said that students thought:

If Dad nor Mom were not college degrees, but they worked very long hours to make ends meet and the students see them still having to have a nice car, still having time to have some kind of a social life, still being able to take trips here and there, that's their normal. So, if my Mom did it,

and she did not have a college degree, then I could do it too that was a big area that we had to break around at least here where I am at.

The BSP said he was constantly battling the student concept of normal and contesting that what students saw, as their norm, could be detrimental to them if they made that their goal in life, and did not try to pursue some postsecondary education. One example he shared on promoting post-secondary opportunities with students as a type of normalcy that was constantly bringing in companies to the school to talk to the students. The BSP shared that the school just had a trade week recently where they brought the United States Postal Service to the school. In the past, he said the school had invited a construction business, a cosmetologist, a barber, and a finance institution. The BSP tried to put the invited companies in front of the students. He said the school staff was always trying to get the companies to explain to the students there was education needed in whatever career they pursued. Another example, if they went in a McDonald's, they have to learn skills such as reading and watching videos on how they make products that they were going to give to customers. The BSP said that there was always a piece of education that comes along with it and the students needed to be aware. The BSP expressed he was trying to make the students understand the value of being a lifelong learner and not to be stuck on the immediacy of what they saw and felt in terms of material things.

In conclusion, there were different perceptions of the students' reasons for not graduating or struggling to graduate. The BSP expressed:

I think there were a lot of reasons that go into why a student cannot or did not earn their diploma in four to five years. One of them was in an urban setting that I've been in, and I've seen a lot of the -- sort of the social challenges that often challenge those students and those families and a lot of our families resort to survival.

The BSP said that sometimes survival did not mean earning a high school diploma. He continued to say, “Students do not look at a high school diploma as being the way out to the next area of their life in terms.” The WSP expressed similar reasons students struggled to graduate. He said, “Life happens! Many of our students in an urban environment were working. Many of our students were taking care of younger siblings. Attendance was an issue and education was just not the top priority.”

The BSP continued to talk about how they had to help the students maneuver those social challenges. He mentioned, “We have students who were homeless, they don’t live with their parents, or they were transient. Many of the students lived from house to house.” The BSP said, “We had a huge number of students whose parents have been or either is incarcerated, living in either a foster situation or sort of family dynamic other than just a parent household.” He continued to talk about the school having students who had a lot of emotional challenges, or a lot of mental health challenges that could inhibit them from attaining a high school diploma in four or five years.

My Reflection on Why Students Do Not Earn Their High School Diploma in Four or Five Years

After listening to the BSP and the WSP, it was obvious that both felt that things in life occurred that caused students to not graduate from high school. I was surprised that both mentioned that the students’ life situations caused them to not graduate high school. In addition, both felt the educational gaps of the students had eventually become too large for the teachers to narrow enough for the students to earn a diploma. I was shocked to hear the BSP talk extensively in the focus group about why students did not graduate high school. This was a topic the BSP seemed to have a lot of knowledge on to share. I

assumed it was because of the continuous conversation with students and parents when life situations impacted the students' progress in earning a diploma. Based on the interview with the BSP on the meaning of a better life for students, I interpreted that the students did not view a high school diploma as an opportunity to create a better life as adults.

I was bothered by the comment from the WSP regarding the monetary benefit for parents when a student attended school. It seemed that the WSP thought there were some parents who did not care about their child's education especially if the child had a disability. I did not hear from either principal on how the 'life happens' situations connected to the parents needing the resources throughout the school year. There was an acknowledgment that some students had difficult situations but I did not hear how community partnerships supported the school or how students had to deal with the situations in order to stay in school. Therefore, I wondered if there were collaborative relationships between community agencies to prevent students from dropping out of school.

Discussion of Relation of the Graduation Rate to School Grade

The last question pertained to the relationship between graduation rate and the school grade. The BSP replied, "Graduation rate, I captured the graduation rate fairly well but again there was so many factors that go into the graduation rate, and some of them were not in the control of the school at all." He continued with stating that schools were still faced with meeting the challenges of graduating students, but the challenges started well beyond the school. In contrast, the WSP replied, "It was one of the multiple measures. When you had a 90 percent or above graduation rate, it was nice to know that

the school received full points on the accountability system for that.” He guessed the state accountability system did speak to graduation rate.

My Reflection on Relation of the Graduation Rate to School Grade

After interviewing the BSP and the WSP on the relationship between the graduation rate and the school letter grade, I got the impression that they were not able to speak in depth about the topic. Both of them had short answers and did not expound on anything. The BSP gave me the impression that he had no control over the relationship between the graduation rate and the overall letter grade. I only could assume that he did not have the knowledge or could not connect the two topics together. On the other hand, the WSP mentioned words in his answer that told me he knew the relationship existed but did not want to expound on it. I did observe fatigue in both of them during this part of the interview. Therefore, I was not sure if it was fatigue or if there were unsure how to answer the question.

Overall, there were different life situations that affected LIW and LIB urban high school students from earning their diplomas. The principals of both high schools believed that food, shelter, and safety outweighed earning a high school diploma regardless of race. Many students did not live with their biological parents. There were several ‘life happens’ situations that occurred, but the LIW urban high school provided more options to help the students earn a high school diploma. Some of the options of the LIW urban high school were collaborating with other educational facilities and/or developing a plan as soon as a student fell behind in earning high school credits, besides retaking classes. The LIB urban high school had mentors, community partners, and success agents to monitor and support students who were struggling to earn high school credits to graduate.

The BSP and the WSP had plenty of communications with students to be successful in high school.

CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSION, DISCUSSION, AND FUTURE CONSIDERATION

Introduction

When urban schools have a more of low income White students (LIW) with higher letter grades than urban schools with a large percentage of Black students from low income homes (LIB), the typical conclusion is that the LIW schools were “better” than the LIB schools (Filgio & Hart, 2015; Milner, 2012; Rockoff & Turner, 2010). However, based on my professional experience as a school administrator and from working in both of these types of urban schools, the state accountability letter grade may not reflect well on the actual quality of the two types of schools. Consequently, my focus for this study was to “compare” one reasonably similar example of each of these two kinds of schools to *explore* whether the letter grade distorts differences in quality. Based on my professional experience and the research literature, I selected four areas that it would be possible to use to “compare” in an *exploratory* fashion these two types of urban schools. Those four were: 1) teacher quality, 2) AP enrollment and completion data, 3) technology usage, and 4) graduation rates, for all of which data were available and/or could be collected.

Data were collected to undertake this exploration in the four designated areas of teacher quality data, AP enrollment and completion data, technology usage data, and graduation rate data. In addition, data were collected from the individual interviews of the principals from each school district. The individual interviews did provide additional insights into the four designated areas of data and provided larger meanings from the urban educators’ perspectives. Responses from the individual interviews were used to develop the questions for the focus group. Overall, the main points of each focus area

revealed some contradictions and affirmations of the research findings in the comparison of a LIW and LIB urban high schools based on the research literature.

In this chapter, the results shared above are connected to the research literature; the larger meaning is described, the implications of the study are detailed, and my experience with the study is articulated.

Recent Research Literature and Connection to Research Study

Teacher Quality

The LIB urban high school principal expressed that the quality of a teacher was based on the evaluator's perception of observing the classroom. The LIW urban principal said his observations were perceived as a "dog and pony" show because the teachers were aware of when the evaluator visited the classroom in the White urban high school. The responses from the principals caused me to think of variations of teachers being viewed as highly skilled and highly effective in educating low-income students of Color. Even though the research literature provided information on teacher preparation programs, this led me to question the quality of principal programs and ongoing principal professional development on identifying a high quality teacher in school districts. The principals of the majority African American and White urban high schools did not mention anything about the content knowledge of the teachers despite the research showing how important content knowledge is to determining the quality of a teacher.

The second key result was the LIB urban high school principal had less academic growth which resulted in a lower state accountability grade, unlike the White urban high school principal who had higher growth points which resulted in a higher state accountability grade. The LIB urban high school had a significant number of teachers in

‘needs improvement’ and ‘ineffective’ ratings in the 2015-2016 school year. Compared to the 2016-2017 school year, the LIB urban high school had a decrease in ‘needs improvement’ and ‘ineffective’ teachers’ ratings. As a result, there was an increase in the overall state accountability points of the letter grade. This affirms research by Priestly, White, and Gong (2005) that both high numbers of students of color and students in high poverty schools continue to exhibit stronger school performance when they have teachers of high quality.

Scholars have noted how teacher quality was related to school performance even after considering demographics (Priestly et al., 2005). Further affirmation of this was that the LIW urban high school had no teachers in the ‘needs improvement’ category, and a significant increase of teachers in the ‘highly effective’ category, which correlates to the increase in accountability points. This likely confirms the research information on teachers who are White women from middle class backgrounds and how they struggle to educate a culturally diverse student body because the clash of culture as well as language barriers within the classroom (Delpit, 2006). The LIW urban high school and LIB urban high school had a significant number of White female teachers. The teachers’ racial make-up at the White high school was similar to the overall student body, but that was not the same at the LIB urban high school.

Another key result regarding teacher quality was that the LIW urban principal thought the growth model reflected a better picture of the instruction in the classroom, which was a part of the state accountability grade. This confirms the research by Popham (1999) that a student’s strengths and weaknesses are based on standardized achievement tests, and the student’s growth over time. This revealed to me that the Department of

Education's primary concern was with students' passing the state assessment, and not growth.

In addition, the state accountability grade did not capture the qualities of a teacher completely. This is supported by Popham (1999) whose research suggests that standardized achievement tests should not be used to judge the quality of education, because students' scores on a test do not provide an accurate index of educational effectiveness. Additional research by Popham (1999) suggests that there is no evidence to support the accuracy of such score-based inferences about instructional quality. Educators in the United States were being evaluated on the basis of their students' performances on tests that were created to produce comparative score interpretations rather than measuring instructional quality. Based on my interviews with the principals, the state assessment was not the main component to determine the quality of the teacher.

Although educators evaluate schools and teachers using student performances on educational tests, there is no meaningful evidence at hand indicating that these tests can distinguish between well-taught and poorly taught students (Popham, 2014). Unfortunately, the Departments of Education in different states use standardized achievement tests to arrive at inferences about the quality of instruction provided to students. Furthermore, with this information on students' knowledge and skills in a content area, standardized achievement tests should be used by teachers to know what students has been exposed to in classes but not to evaluate the quality of education. There are external factors such as student-teacher relationships that can influence the student achievement and teacher effectiveness.

The most significant result regarding teacher quality was that both principals said the key to teacher quality was student-teacher relationships. Student-teacher relationships were a key component of teacher quality in both urban high schools, but there was not an area on the teacher evaluation for student-teacher relationships for either urban school. It was important for teachers to have the content knowledge, but in an urban district, teachers must be compassionate and effective in the classroom. Talbert-Johnson (2006) stated effective teachers have intangible qualities or dispositions that are difficult to define and even more difficult to assess. Student performances increases as teacher gain experience and when they build relationships with students (Peske & Haycock, 2006). Teachers who have some type of relationship with students can influence the academic performance of students in the classrooms. As the student-teacher relationship was a key component of the quality of a teacher for the LIB and LIW urban principals, it was unfortunate that it was not emphasized more on the teacher evaluation. There is a significant amount of research by Peske & Haycock (2006) to support the importance of student-teacher relationships. Overall, teacher quality could not be determined through an evaluation tool that did not have the components the principals valued as key to engaging students such as student-teacher relationships. A passing score on a state assessment cannot determine the quality of a teacher if growth measures are not included in the accountability.

Advanced Placement

According to Ohrt and Lambie (2009), there are educational programs that promote equal access to higher education for traditionally underserved students. This educational opportunity did exist for both urban schools through AP courses. In addition,

the LIW urban high school had an early college program. However, through my research, the early college program was not offered of the same quality at the LIB urban high school as the LIW urban high school. It was interesting to hear both school principals mention reviewing the student academic records to determine if the students should be in AP courses. The White urban high school provided an academic prerequisite to prepare students for AP classes. The unofficial prerequisites were to prepare the students academically before enrolling in the AP class. I reviewed my notes from the LIB urban principal and noticed there was not any preparation program for the students. This confirms the research by Griffin and Allen (2006) that school leaders fail to adjust AP programs for students' ability prior to entering into high school. Griffin and Allen (2006) suggested that schools with majority African American student populations often do not offer ideal learning and college preparatory environments for students.

When I looked at the state accountability report for each urban high school, there was a gap in participation. Despite an increase in students of Color enrolling in AP courses, there was still a gap between White and African American student enrollment. The White urban high school had more students taking AP exams than the African American urban high school. The LIW urban high school had 218 students participants in 2015-2016 compared to LIB urban high school that had 155 student participants. Again, in 2016-2017, the LIB had 194 students participating and the LIB had 49 students participating. Conger, Long, and Iatarola (2009) confirm that the gap between African American students and White students in AP courses. According to Conger, Long, and Iatarola (2009), the enrollment gap is larger in low-income schools.

I was surprised that the LIB urban high school principal said that he attempted to change the mindset of students to enroll in AP classes. This action by the LIB urban principal affirmed that students of Color and low-income students still had reservations about enrolling in advanced courses. Conger et al., (2009) confirms this trend of high achieving African American students resisting taking advanced courses because they disproportionately fear academic failure, the stigma of acting White, or being isolated in a majority White class. For the LIB urban principal to say he had to change the mind-set of students suggested to me that students of today still did not see the pay-off, there are still negative perceptions of being an African American student in a AP classes, there is still a lack of human connection in the classes, and that students of Color feel unwelcome. Brak, Garnett, and Burley (2001) noted the characteristic barriers for African American students not enrolled in AP courses, such as being identified as “sellouts” among peers, a lack of encouragement from school personnel, and had lower academic scores.

In contrast, the LIW urban high school principal focused on changing the mindset of the teachers on the type of students in AP courses. I was surprised the LIW urban high school principal did not have the same issues as the LIB urban principal. The LIW urban high school had the students who wanted to enroll in the courses but it was a manner of preparedness and teacher mind-set. Song and Owens (2011) research suggests that students attending schools that are well-resourced and offer rigorous curricula are mainly located in suburbs. This was contradictory for the LIW urban high school because the school was well-equipped with a 1:1 program and LMS. Unfortunately, the LIB urban high school was not well-equipped with a 1:1 program or an established LMS for

students and teachers, which was unclear to me. The LIB urban school district had more resources than the LIW urban high school. Technology appeared not to be a priority for the LIB urban district.

Additionally, an incentive program for taking the AP exam and earning a particular score was established at the LIW urban high school. The African American urban high school had no existing incentive AP program. Brak et al. (2011) found that 16 states offered monetary incentives for students to take the AP exams as a strategy to increase enrollment in AP courses and reduce testing fees. Conger et al. (2009) in their study found that small schools with students of low economic status offered a variety of AP courses and implemented a program that incentivized the teachers and students. I am still contemplating why the LIW urban high school created the community partnerships to provide the incentive programs to eliminate excuses such as fees for the students. The LIB urban high school did not focus on the community partnerships to leverage the incentives to get students to enroll and take the test. It seemed the LIB urban school district did not see the pay-off, human connections, and the positive perception.

Overall, the LIW urban high school was increasing AP participation and course offerings, establishing partnerships to support academic programs and eliminate financial barriers for students, preparing students before enrolling in advanced courses, and changing the mind-set of the teachers regarding the type of student in advanced courses. With much frustration, I realized the LIB urban high school is in a stagnated position. The school had not increased advanced course offerings, there was a significant decline of students participating in AP exams, there was not an incentive program, and there was not an established preparation class for students before enrolling in advanced courses.

Much to my surprise, this evidence was on the state accountability report card under the category ‘college and career readiness.’ This confirmed that students in the LIB urban high school were not participating in AP courses in high school and missing the benefit of being in the courses. It also confirmed that nothing had improved with the student perception of taking advanced courses at a LIB urban school.

Technology Access

In order for technology to have a major influence on the educational system, teachers and students must not only have access to technology, but have access to technology in a contextual matter that is culturally relevant, responsive, and meaningful to their educational practice to promote quality teaching and active student learning (Song & Owens, 2011). Based on from Song and Owens (2011) research the technology access to promote learning appeared to be true for the LIW urban high school, but not the LIB urban high school. This was evident by the 1:1 device program at the LIW urban high school. Unlike the LIB urban high school, the teachers had technology carts to check out for students to use laptops. I was shocked that the LIB urban school was doing cart check out because the principal mentioned how he was a part of the 1:1 program in the same school district in prior years. The answers from the urban principals gave me reason to think about how a school district maintained a 1:1 device program so it did not have to go back to teachers checking out technology carts. Again, the LIB urban high school was behind the LIW urban high school in technology access in the school. This supports the research literature, specifically Owen and Song’s (2011) study with African American and Latinx students who were poor and considered working class and their lack of access to information and technology resources.

The LIW urban high school utilized an LMS for student engagement and access to courses, and for teachers to submit lesson plans. The use of technology in the LIB urban high school affirmed Pinar (2004) research that more than 80% of teachers used it to upload lessons plans. This was evident by the LIB urban high school principal saying the teachers used the LMS to upload lesson plans. The LIW urban high school utilized the technology devices and the LMS for more than teachers completing required work, but for educational exposure for students to learn different content. The LIW urban high school was contradictory to the research from Pinar (2004) that explained the current use of computer technology in urban schools caused students to become discouraged because they become disembodied and alienated from authentic learning. LIB students were not experiencing technology in real life situations, but only in testing situations to determine their knowledge or mastery of a skill. This was affirmed by the LIW urban high school using technology to prepare students on how to take an assessment on a computer and learn content through an online class.

Students attending the LIW urban high school accessed textbooks and course work on an LMS. The LIB urban high school did not have systems in place for students to access e-textbooks or course work consistently through the LMS. Again, this affirmed that the LIW urban high school students were experiencing the use of technology in the classroom at a higher rate than students of Color attending a LIB urban high school. Neither of the urban high school principals mentioned anything about the limits of human-to-human communication with technology. The LIW urban high school principal talked about how students could communicate with their teachers more in the LMS for help because of the 24 hours/7 days a week access to teachers. Overall, this confirmed

that students attending a LIW urban high school had more exposure to technology through an LMS than students attending the LIB urban high school did. There seemed to be a higher expectation for students and teachers to use technology to educate students differently at the LIW urban high school. Again, the LIB urban high school was further behind the LIW urban high school in this core area.

Graduation Rate

Dropping out of high school has become the norm in urban school districts (Patterson, Hale, & Stessman, 2007). This norm derived from the “assumption that the dropout problem [is] due to the student and his or her family” (Patterson, Hale, & Stessman, 2007, p. 2). There are different “life happens” situations that derail White and African American urban high school students from earning their high school diplomas. The “life happens” situations occurred in LIW and LIB, but the LIW urban high school had more obvious options for the students to earn a high school diploma. The principals of both high schools believed that food, shelter, and safety outweighed earning a high school diploma regardless of race. Many students across both schools did not live with their biological parents. Some of the options for the LIW urban high school were collaborating with other educational facilities and/or developing a plan as soon as a student fell behind in earning high school credits besides retaking classes. A similar example of this is in Prairie High School in Kansas which has additional programs to support the school’s changing student population, especially students who failed courses or for students who dropped out of school, to earn a high school diploma (Patterson, Hale, & Stessman, 2007). The African American urban high school had mentors,

community partners, and success agents to monitor and support students who were struggling to earn high school credits to graduate.

Heling (2011) determined that No Child Left Behind (NCLB) had a positive impact on accountability of low-performing students and schools. This was evident in the LIW urban high school graduation rate, which was significantly higher than the LIB urban high school even in 2016-2017 when it dropped. The LIW urban high school graduation rate was 88.8 % in 2015-2016 and 79.1% in 2016-2017, in comparison with the LIB urban high school graduation rate which was 55.1% in 2015-2016 and 68.1% in 2016-2017. This significant difference made me think that it was due to the options offered to students when they were credit deficit, the student-teacher relationships, or community partnerships. The lack of effective academic options at the LIB urban high school for the students provided evidence of deficit thinking by the BSP.

Deficit thinking refers to the belief that low-income or students of Color do not perform well in school because of deficits or defects within the student or family (Garcia & Guerra, 2004). In addition, deficit thinking led to describing urban students in Garcia and Guerra (2004) research as being responsible for their lack of persistence in school. The LIW urban high school principal was exploring more options to get students to graduate compared to the LIB urban high school principal. Was this because the LIW urban high school principal was held to a higher accountability level for the graduation rate? Or was it a desire for the students to earn a high school diploma because the majority of the student population and staff were similar in race and culture? Ford and Quinn (2010) found that White teachers who lack exposure to African American culture

were prone to negatively describe African American students as lackadaisical, violent, and unmotivated.

Communication and cultural practices in schools for family involvement may not be viewed the same by all parents (Patterson, Hale, & Stesson, 2007). This was evident in the LIW and LIB urban high schools through parent meetings, family nights, and phone messages. There is a different group of people the urban high schools communicated with more about academics. For example, the LIW urban high school communicates more with students unlike the LIB urban high school communicates to staff.

Overall, the LIW urban high school graduated more students than the LIB urban high school. The LIW urban high school principal was actively involved in the graduation progress, where the LIB urban high school principal had several groups supporting the graduation process. The LIW urban high school principal had an obvious academic plan for students who became credit deficit. His goal was to help the students graduate from high school if the student attended school. The LIW urban high school principal was more involved in knowing the academic data of students in each cohort and the effectiveness of the teachers regardless of the evaluation tool information. I observed that the LIB urban high school principal relied on others to know the data, and inform him of the data on students to track. Again, the LIW urban high school was out performing LIB urban high school and this was evident on the state accountability grade.

Defining Urban and Its Intersection with Race

During the individual and focus group interviews, questions were asked based on the respondents' understanding and definition of "urban." It was the researcher's presumption that the principals would describe challenges and potentially, some of the

benefits of urban school environments. It was also presumed that within the broader scope of its definition, these respondents would engage in some discussion about the matter of race and the role it plays in these settings.

The BSP defined urban as “a densely populated area with a lot of the social ills that prohibited or inhibited people from accessing resources and information that would give them the ability to progress through life with an inordinate amount of challenges, and economic social challenges.” In contrast, the WSP’ description was more succinct. He described an urban area as being “very populous” and as having qualities that were in contrast to rural and suburban environments, If I were to describe a rural setting, I would describe a rural setting as being somewhere that was very small in population with what I would consider to be limited in resources. A suburban area had the amenities and the resources of an urban area but did not quite have the diversity of an urban area.

In the WSP’s definition of urban, as a contrast to rural and suburban (settings), very little else was gleaned on how he perceived urban settings in a direct way (in other words, whether the limited resources of a rural area translated to urban settings as being more plentiful in resources by comparison, etc.).

The responses of the principals by way of content appeared “safe,” as not to offend or for the purposes of being politically provocative. Each of their descriptions about what constituted “urban” were absent of any discussions about race. This appeared to be especially relevant to this preliminary study because the researcher sought to compare the two settings based on the predominant racial make-up. This distinction was made clear at the outset of the interviews with the respondents. Moreover, as I reflected

on the principals' answers, I began to consider not merely the content of the messages, but also the processes in how each of them expressed themselves. For example, both the BSP and the WSP appeared nervous in answering the questions as evidenced by a certain amount of pause and eye contact avoidance. Because of the principals' answers in the individual interviews, it was asked during the focus group session as to why race was not mentioned in their answers.

The BSP stated in the focus group setting that he "took race for granted," and further stated, "I mean, race involves whatever the race was, be it African American or otherwise. Race involves everything and I tend to take it for granted." He also expressed to the interviewer and the WSP that urban was more defined not necessarily by race but by the complexities that "respective races" have to endure, deal with, manipulate, and overcome as it pertained to urban education. The BSP also stated that he thought some of the complexities about urban education were more than race because race was ubiquitous. I can only speculate that the BSP was referring to people of color, but his statements were not entirely clear to me because he did not say what the complexities that outweighed race were, or even how certain non-racial qualities outweighed racial issues. I can only speculate that some of the complexities to which he was referring were income level, household members, education level, and marital status.

The WSP expressed agreement with the BSP by repeating that urban is more than "just race." He explained that urban presented many opportunities that may not be afforded in a rural setting. He said race was "just in an urban environment." I speculated that this statement from the WSP meant that he perceived race as characterizing urban areas because of the association of Black and Brown students in these settings, whereas

the composition of rural areas as primarily White erased the notion of race. In other words, he viewed race (erroneously) as invoked with the presence of non-White people and in the absence of Black and Brown people, race is no longer an issue. The WSP also stated an urban area had all different races of color and the make-up of an urban area was just understood.

The WSP continued, speaking curiously in the past tense, “You had to have a passion for urban, it was an environment you wanted to be in, thrive in and made other lives better, or it definitely can scare you to death.” In view of his earlier statements about rural areas, I began to wonder if the WSP believed that the special circumstances surrounding urban environments, particularly with the inclusion of Black and Brown people, required a sort of heroism that may not be called for in regards to those who teach in White, rural areas. What would be the difference, or would the insinuation that the comparatively White settings were ‘standard’ or normal? Would this statement also suggest that the heroics in working in these settings that for raceless White teachers, urban schools would position Whites in these settings as self-sacrificing in comparison to Black teachers and administrators? Such an assumption could be reached given the insinuation of “scaring you to death” invoked stereotypes of urban settings as rampant in criminal behavior, for example.

After listening to the BSP and the WSP answers on race, I was stunned at the level of content expressed by the two, characterized in part by code words in which race was used to describe only Black and Brown people and not Whites, and by some lack of engagement of how matters “beyond race” were implicated in how urban can be defined

or described. I also was concerned by the level of discomfort that both of the participants exhibited when trying to talk about race.

What added further to my surprise was the finding that the avoidance of racial engagement was evident not only in the WSP, but also the BSP. I assumed that the racial association of the BSP with many of the students and families he served would translate into having a greater understanding of (and hence, a better articulation of) the issues that surround race and racism from the standpoint of historically marginalized groups. This does not mean that I expected *less* from the WSP, but rather, that the differences would be minimal at best because of the onus that many African Americans assume when they take on positions of leadership in institutions that are comprised of other African American and/or historically marginalized populations. I personally have been assured in the past that when Black or Brown people have taken leadership in settings, they did so because of the affiliation they have with the people they serve and the belief that they possess the vantage points and levels of caring not historically shown by Whites.

Still in view of both of the respondents' definitions of urban, little explanation was given by either of the respondents on how race factors into urban settings, as in the significance of "economic, social challenges" (the BSP's interview response) relative to settings that were in certain geographical locations and that consisted primarily of Black and Brown students. It also was not clear from the WSP on how or why race was "just a part of an urban area." The BSP and the WSP answers made me think of the words by Ladson-Billings (2009), who offered that:

[T]he usual antidote for the persistent view of African American children is for the viewer to pretend that he or she does not see the color that once forced their ancestors into slavery. Thus, the teacher claims to be color-blind. However, such claims cannot be valid. Given the significance of

race and color in American society, it is impossible to believe that a classroom teacher does not notice the race and ethnicity of children she is teaching. Further, claiming not to notice, the teacher is saying that she is dismissing one of the most salient features of the child's identity. (p. 36)

This message from Ladson-Billings supports my thoughts of how the principals were tongue-tied and by implication, subtly dismissive of race as playing a part of urban communities and school settings. It appeared as if the BSP and the WSP did not want to acknowledge race and the ways the phenomenon has an impact on their students in urban settings. It is also likely that neither of the two was interested in engaging in this discussion in the presence of the other and/or me the interviewer.

Furthermore, this matter of a rather confused and diminished engagement about racial issues raises concerns about the level of commitment that the principals are able to provide in view of the pervasive and violent nature of racism--violent not only in terms of direct, physical violations, but also in its structural manifestations. Pointedly, when I indicated to the principals that they had not mentioned in their individual interviews, both agreed that this lack of mention was somehow a *good* thing in how they both described "urban." This perception that it is better to sidestep, downplay, or even ignore race is all too familiar with notions of color-blindness (Bonilla-Silva & Forman, 2000), and with it, the belief that all U.S. races were viewed socio-politically as equal. The WSP's comments especially were suggestive of a lack of understanding of how race influences education and other areas in this country. When "White individuals do not pay attention to race, there is often a negative effect on people of color such as feeling less motivated and engaged in the environment" (Neville, Gallardo, & Sue, 2016, p. 9). My assumption of the WSP's comments on race is that he has adopted stereotypes that downplay the systemic problems that influence racial disparities and that this could mean that he

viewed his Black and Brown students in negative ways. It is also likely that his White privilege contributes to him not thinking about his own race and his impact on others as a White person.

This “color blindness” or the general premise of saying “I don't see color” is an ideology that racism is perpetuated by discussions of race and that by not discussing race it will no longer be real (Bonilla-Silva & Forman, 2000). The feelings of both the WSP and the BSP are in agreement with the findings from a meta-analysis of research on color-blindness by Neville, Gallardo, and Sue (2016). According to these authors, both White people and people of color can adopt a color-blind racial perspective; however, the frequency and consequences of this endorsement differ by race. Endorsement of color-blind racial ideology (CBRI) among White people helps protect the individual from “appearing” racially intolerant and moreover perpetuates racial privileges through inaction (and thus maintenance of the racial status quo). People of color who adopt a racial color-blind perspective may work against their individual and group interest by supporting policies and practices that unfairly discriminate against people of color (p. 25). Ignoring the Blackness of urban students is a form of colorblindness that “creates a society that denies their negative racial experiences, rejects their cultural heritage, and invalidates their unique perspectives” (Williams, 2011, p. 2).

In addition, when both principals said they took race for granted, it made me think of how the dominant culture had altered their reality to lessen the integral part of race in urban. Their comments confirmed to me that the dominant racial frame was altered in some ways, especially by softening some racist imagery and re-emphasizing notions of fairness and opportunity that had actually been part of some versions of the framework

for decades (Feagin, 2010). Furthermore, when I asked specifically about race, the WSP agreed with the BSP that race was taken for granted in the urban community. The WSP alignment with the BPS caused me to pause and think that my race was only considered when others could benefit from it. Otherwise, then, race was considered not to be a factor and did not matter in the urban community. The WSP thoughts were of the White elites who act to improve the conditioning of Black Americans only when Whites themselves can benefit in the process (Feagin, 2010). I believe that the WSP made sure the African American students did well because it was a benefit for the LIW urban school. As he stated in the individual interview, the Early College program did a better job at focusing on students of color being a part of the program than the school recruiting students to enroll in advanced placement classes. Again, I thought if the students of color were a benefit in the advanced placement classes for the LIW urban school and a positive reflection on the principal, then the staff would be intentional with enrolling the student of color in the classes. To me, this reaffirmed how race does matter in defining and explaining urban settings.

As I reflected on the responses of the BSP, I speculate that because of his lack of articulation about race as a factor of what is "urban," that his presence as an administrator of the school may be because he sees himself as one of the "exceptional" African Americans. Perhaps he does not see himself as similar to his students and their families unless they possess qualities of achievement that he perceives to be exceptional. A contrast would be to see most students as having the potential to succeed if the conditions surrounding their lives were improved *inclusive* of issues related to race. His demeanor and answers during the individual interview appeared to be disconnected from the urban

schools, specifically the lack of conversation on the African American students. His demeanor made me think of the relatively privileged Black elite who turned against the Black urban poor, condemning them and distancing themselves, while at the same time presenting themselves as legitimate spokespeople for the disadvantage (Alexander, 2012). This was affirmed when he said he took race for granted while working in an urban community. Based on my observation and the BSP comments, he appeared to be distancing himself from the poor urban Blacks because he did not speak specifically on how he supports the improvement of the students in the urban community. When elites distance themselves from poor urban Blacks, it can hamper the solidarity that has served a vital role in progressive social movements involving Black people, as was evident with the civil rights movement.

Another comment that caused me to want more clarification was when the BSP stated that there were many complexities of urban in addition to race. I do not know why the BSP did not describe how race was a part of the complexity in an urban community. I can speculate that the BSP meant complexity included the number of people living in a home, two-parent home vs. single parent home, social economic level, and relationships between other races in the community. In conclusion, race does matter when describing urban or any aspect of education in the United States. If race is ignored in deliberations about urban schools, then people in leadership positions in particular can perpetuate injustices in these settings.

Implication of Study

When this study was started, I thought I would find that the school with predominately students of Color would be equal to or better than compared to the school

with predominately White students. However, I found in this limited exploratory study of the two schools, that this was not true. Though the school grade for each school did not exactly represent the schools in the four areas studied, the White school was better. However, given that this was an exploratory study of only two schools, the results cannot be generalized. Nonetheless, there were several implications from the results of this exploratory research study when considering the four focus areas together. After I analyzed the four focus areas together to determine if the state accountability letter grade distorts the educational quality by comparing a LIB and a LIW urban high school, it became clear that the LIB urban high school did not have the same educational quality as the LIW urban high school that impacted the state accountability grade. Based on my research this meant there were not significant improvements in the four focus areas for the LIB urban high school to show evidence that distorts the state accountability grade. Although the LIB urban high school letter grade was not an ‘F,’ it is still a failing school due to the lack of growth in the four focus areas that affect the state accountability grade. I noticed that if all of the focus areas increased then the overall academic performance of students on the state assessment would increase, and if there was a decrease or no movement in a focus area then the student scores increased a little or not at all. This decrease or increase was eventually reflected in the state accountability letter grade. The most important theme that developed out of this study, though, was the continued lack of highly qualified teachers in LIB urban schools.

The LIB urban high school had less effective teachers in the classrooms, which led to little to no change in educational quality. These less effective teachers were rated appropriately as ineffective or had low scores in effective categories for both the LIB and

LIW schools, but the LIB urban high school had the highest number of ineffective teachers. Relatedly, Peske and Haycock (2006) found large discrepancies in the qualifications of teachers in diverse and high poverty schools versus teachers serving in schools with few students of Color and students from low-income backgrounds. However, low-income students and students of Color had higher performance gains with teachers of higher quality (Peske & Haycock, 2006). Additional research by Priestly, White, and Gong (2005) found that both high numbers of students of Color and high poverty schools continue to exhibit stronger school performance when they have teachers of high quality. This was evident in the LIB urban high school teacher quality data and state accountability grade. As a result, the school performance is not as strong in schools with high numbers of students of Color and high number of students from low-income backgrounds with low teacher quality. Thus, Priestly, White, and Gong (2005) have noted how teacher quality is related to school performance even after considering demographics.

The second implication is the limited number of AP courses offered for high school students due to a low percentage of highly effective teachers in the LIB urban high school compared to the LIW urban high school. Teachers who were highly effective knew their content area, had great student-teacher relationships, and could handle additional training to teach an AP course. Presley et al. (2005) found that students of Color who attended high poverty secondary schools tended to have one high quality teacher who earned a degree in a specific content area. In addition, Griffin and Allen (2006) concluded that urban schools lack rigor because of large classes, outdated libraries, and minimum offerings of AP courses. This was evident when I looked at the

number of students who participated in AP courses attending the LIW urban high school compared to the LIB urban high school. If a school does not have the qualified teachers for advanced courses, then the courses cannot be offered to the students.

Also, if the teacher was ineffective or had a low effective score, there was reduced opportunity for students to be exposed to technology in the classroom because the focus was on improving the teacher skills with the hope that students would improve in learning. This had a negative impact on students' technology skills and their understanding on how to demonstrate their knowledge of what they had learned at school. Therefore, the LIB students struggled to demonstrate knowledge on a state assessment test given on a computer. Research has demonstrated that urban schools of lower SES are only half as likely to have Internet access compared to schools of higher SES (American Council of Education, 2003). For example, in my research the LIB and LIW urban teachers used technology for drill and practice. Pinar (2004) found that technology tools were being used to 'drill and kill' students into passing standardized tests, and not actually being integrated into the classroom instruction or practice. Furthermore, Pinar explained that current use of computer technology in urban schools turns students into disembodied and alienated learners in the classroom. That is, students are not experiencing technology in real life situations, but only in testing situations to determine their knowledge or mastery of a skill. This was evident on the LIW urban high school that had an established 1:1 program and an LMS, compared to the LIB urban high school with check out carts and an LMS for teacher usage. Teachers of Color in urban schools are twice as likely to possess inadequate technology and informational literacy, training

skills, and knowledge to work technology into the classrooms (Owen, Song, & Kidd, 2007), unlike White teachers in high suburban, rural, or urban SES schools.

The final implication was the lack of options for LIB urban high school students to earn credits to graduate on time at the same rate as the students in the LIW urban high school. Urban high schools have to develop new programs and options for students to earn credits. For example, Prairie High School in Kansas has additional programs to support the school's changing student population to support students who failed courses or to assist students who dropped out of school to earn a high school diploma (Patterson, Hale, & Stessman, 2007). This was evident in how the LIW urban high school had more options to provide to students to earn high school credits than the LIB urban high school. Overall, the LIB and LIW urban high schools continued to have significant gaps in various areas that determine education quality.

Implications of the Study for Research, Policy, and Practice

The potential future research could include finding a teacher evaluation tool that captures student-teacher relationships and the impact of these relationships on student academics. Another future area for research is determining how much the graduation rate improved for low-income African American students compared to low income White students with the new Every Student Succeed Act (ESSA). Future research might also consider if there is an academic impact based on the level of the teacher commitment and student-teacher relationships working in an urban school. Lastly, future research might investigate effective incentives to use to get students to participate in AP courses and take the exams.

One of the recommended changes in policy is to implement a rubric in the teacher evaluation for principals to rate student-teacher relationships. This can be included in a section on the teacher evaluation. Other recommendations include requiring teachers to use technology with students with the required technology standards; the creation of district alternative academic option plans that layout when students become credit deficit and the options to continue toward earning a high school diploma; and lastly, the creation of a course to prepare students in middle school for potentially enrolling in advanced classes in high school.

One of recommended changes for leadership practices is requiring principals to participate in a year-long professional development program centered on recognizing effective teachers and to determine the quality level of a teacher. Another recommendation is that principals need to be required to review the technology plan of the district and at the building level to make sure goals are being accomplished and there is a positive impact on academic programs in the schools. In addition, principals need to know the school data and be able to explain it and talk about plans for improving teaching and learning in the school. Lastly, principals need to be required to collaborate with community partners to gain access to their resources to impact academic programs in the schools.

My Experiences with this Study

In my work experience, I had wondered if there were academic differences between an urban White and an urban African American high school. As I reflected on the African American urban high school and the state accountability grade it received, I became frustrated because the White urban school district in my research was seen in a

different way. I began to wonder about the state letter grades the schools received and if these grades could be justified by graduation rates, AP enrollment, teacher quality, and technology access. I wondered how these four areas related to the student academic successes in an urban high school. How do these four areas influence the principals' perceptions on student academic success despite the state accountability grade? Furthermore, I wondered if I studied the African American high school in the same areas as the White urban high school, how would they would compare? Would perceptions of individuals be different because of the ethnic differences of the urban high school? My hope during this study was to find that an African American urban high school when compared to a White urban high school was equal to or had improved in education quality.

My overall experience was positive, but there were a few delays. One school district had a more thorough process in getting approval to conduct research in the school, but the data I received violated confidentiality. I received information with student and teacher names that had to be deleted. This delay was frustrating because I was ready for the individual interviews. In the individual interviews, I felt like a robot asking the same questions knowing the answers could be different. Some of the participants' responses were shocking, but I had to maintain a 'non-emotional' face during the interviews. I enjoyed the focus group dialogue between the participants. I was able to observe candid conversations among the participants. I found myself referring to the data I received from the school district to compare with what the principals said. Toward the end of the study, I became irritated because I realized nothing has changed for LIB urban students despite the efforts of many educators over many years. Despite

the narratives being told to the public, the LIB urban students were still behind especially when compared to the LIW urban students. There was still a gap in technology access, advanced placement offerings, graduation rates, and exposure to high quality teachers.

At the end of the study, I did not find that the LIB urban high school was equal to or better than the LIW urban high school. Even though there was growth in the four focus areas and in the state accountability grade for LIB urban high school, the LIW urban high school outperformed the LIB urban high school in all areas. Based on my interviews and data, I believe that the LIW urban high school had more highly qualified teachers because of the test scores. The teachers knew the content, how to teach it, and created good student-teacher relationships. I did not get the same feeling from the LIB urban high school teachers. This feeling confirms again that more ineffective and low-effective teachers were in LIB urban high schools. This may confirm that leaders cannot find or will not recruit the best teachers for LIB urban high schools, but hire a person to fill the spot to say that they have teachers in every classroom. Furthermore, this continues to be disheartening because the LIW urban high school had less resources, higher crime, and more drug-related criminal activities for the population area than did the LIB urban high school. I was amazed at the community and business support for the LIW urban high school related to the academic programs. I was puzzled by the lack of community and business support for the academic programs in the LIB urban high school. The LIB urban high school supports mostly included volunteer time with students. So, I wonder, where does the community support go and to what schools? Technology in the LIB urban high school was almost non-existent, but surprisingly for a school in financial crisis, the LIW urban high school students had technology devices. Conducting this study at this time,

confirmed to me that despite how things might appear, much has not changed in the K-12 education system.

Conclusion

What does the letter grade really say about LIB and LIW urban schools? For me, the letter grade says nothing because there has to be a review of all the areas that make up the total points that determine the letter grade by the state. Within each area of the data, one has to flush out what it means and that cannot be done by looking at an assigned grade alone. Despite the LIB urban school being rated a 'D', I struggled with that because the school was still significantly behind the LIW urban high school. The LIW urban high school pass rate was not significantly better, but the school gained points in other areas. Unfortunately, I thought my research would reveal that both schools were performing the same in the areas of teacher quality, advanced placement access, technology access, and graduation rate. Therefore, my findings led me to wonder why the differences still exist. Was it due to a cultural or racial structural system that goes back to slavery and post slavery? Was it because African Americans are still behind because when they arrived in this country it was difficult to assimilate because of the different culture and language? Is this history still creating barriers for African Americans to experience equity in schools and to perform equally with other races of the same social economic status?

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EDUCATION

| | | |
|--------------------|---|---|
| August 2004 | Master of Education, Educational Leadership | Indiana Wesleyan University Marion, Indiana |
| May 2000 | Master of Education, Special Education | Indiana University Purdue University at Indianapolis |
| May 1995 | Bachelor of Science, Sociology | Indiana University-Bloomington, Indiana |

ACADEMIC HONORS AND AWARDS

| | | |
|----------------------|--|---|
| 2018 | African American Excellence in Education Award | Indiana Black Expo Inc. |
| November 2010 | Teacher College | Ball State University |
| October 2010 | Professional Development Award | Indiana State University |
| May 2010 | Black Male Initiative program | Howard University Alumni Association |
| February 2010 | Jefferson Award for Public Service | Arlington Community High School |

HIGHLIGHTS OF PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE

| | | |
|-----------------------|--|---|
| 1/2020 | Assistant Vice President of K-14 Statewide Initiatives | Ivy Tech Community College |
| 7/2015-1/2020 | Director of Youth Opportunity, Diversity, and Special Programs Director of Secondary Curriculum | Muncie Community Schools |
| 8/2014-6/2015 | Co-Principal | Charter School USA |
| 1/2010-8/2014 | Principal | Indianapolis Public Schools |
| 8/2009-12/2010 | Vice-Principal | Indianapolis Public Schools |
| 8/2007-7/2009 | Academic Dean | Indianapolis Public Schools |
| 8/2003-7/2007 | Special Education Instructional Coach | Indianapolis Public Schools |
| 1/1996-7/2003 | Special Education Teacher | Indianapolis Public School Corporation |

PRESENTATIONS

| | | |
|-------------|---|---|
| 2019 | “Differentiated Instruction” | Presented at Noxubee County Public Schools, Macon, Mississippi |
| 2018 | “Discipline with Dignity” | Muncie Community Schools Professional Development |
| 2018 | “8-Steps” | Muncie Community Schools Professional Development |
| 2017 | “Co-teaching” | Muncie Community Schools Professional Development |
| 2017 | “Center for Digital Education Indiana” | Panelist, Indianapolis, Indiana |
| 2016 | “Differentiated Instruction” | Presented at Esmeralda County School District Staff Professional Development Retreat, Carson City, Nevada |
| 2014 | “Is There One Best System” | Presented at Critical Race Studies in Education Association (CRSEA) at Vanderbilt, Nashville, TN |
| 2014 | “Is There One Best System” | Presented at Indiana Black Education Conference (IBE), Indianapolis, IN |
| 2007 | "Educational Strategies for Home" | Presented at IPS#88, Indianapolis, IN |
| 2007 | "Unpacking the Standards" | Presented at IPS- Arlington High School, Indianapolis, IN |
| 2007 | “Special Education-NCLB and AYP” | Presented at Northwest High School, Indianapolis, IN |
| 2006 | “Assistive Technology for Struggling Readers” | Presented at Indianapolis Public Schools Assistive Technology Fair, Indianapolis, IN |
| 2004 | “Teaching to the Standards through Motivating Students” | Presented at the IPS ABC Regional Conference, Indianapolis, IN |

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

| | | |
|-------------|---|--------------------------|
| 2015 | Flipped Learning | Muncie Community Schools |
| 2011 | Look 2 Learning – A New Focus for Classroom Walkthrough | Look 2 Learning |
| 2009 | Advancing Academic Excellent Training | Advancing Academic |

| | | |
|--------------------|--|--|
| 2009 | InSAI -Indiana Student Achievement Institute Training | Indiana Student Achievement |
| 2008 | Buck Institute for Educators Project-based Training | Buck Institute |
| 2007 | Coordinator | AVID -Advancement Via Individual Determination |
| 2007 | Training/facilitator | TESA (Teacher Expectation and Student Expectation) |
| 2006 | CollegeBoard English Curriculum | Springboard LA/Math Training |
| 2005 | IPS Leadership Identification and Development Program | Indianapolis Public Schools |
| 2004 | Creative Problem Solving Program | Blumberg Center- Indiana State University |
| 2004 | Designing Motivation for All Learners | Performance Learning System |
| 2004 | Trained in Essential Facilitation for IEP Meetings | JDL Associates |
| Summer 2003 | Coaching/facilitated planning /designing classrooms for learning | Frank DeSensi |

COMMUNITY SERVICE

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| 2008-2010 | Intern | United Water Summer Internship- Adopt a school program that put student to work in the facilities, resume building, college preparation, entrepreneurship, and environmental workshop |
| 2007-2010 | Board member | Our Kids Program- mentor program for African-American students |
| 2007-2010 | Board member | Net-Literacy-non for profit organization that promotes computer and Internet literacy throughout communities |