Finding High Achievement in the Alabama Black-Belt

By

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Abstract

The history of the United States is steeped with evidence of educational inequities based on race. From the time of slavery, a time in which slaves were forbade to learn to read, to the most recent education legislations, which are apparently geared to close the achievement gap between white and African American students, the social and educational structure throughout the nation has failed to proportionately educate all students despite their race. The dereliction of whites to acknowledge the disparities of educating African American students is acknowledged as a falsehood while curricula, educational assessments, educational funding, and ongoing legislation continues to disproportionately cater to predominately white and affluent schools. This leaves African American students, especially those in poor, rural, and urban locations, at an educational disadvantage. These schools typically possess a high number of minority and impoverished students as well as low academic achievement. Yet, there were schools in such areas that managed to acquire high levels of academic success, and most of the identified schools were elementary and middle schools. With relatively few high schools identified, this case study examined Lynnewood High School located in the poor, rural Alabama Black Belt. By interviewing four members of the School Leadership Team (SLT) and six interviewees of the Recent Graduate Group (RGG), I qualitatively determined that Lynnewood High School met the criteria to be a High-Poverty, High-Minority, High-Achieving (HPMA) school, worthy to be mentioned for academic achievement awards, and to be a beacon and guide for academic achievement for other high-minority, rural schools. Academic success was determined by assessing the interview responses and various academic awards and their criteria. The school managed to accomplish academic success despite many obstacles including state legislation.

Dedication

I dedicate this dissertation to God, my wife, my mother, and my family for supporting me spiritually, mentally, and physically through my educational endeavors. I also dedicate this dissertation to my children (students) and to all African American students that beat the odds of social, financial, and academic opposition every day.

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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

The United States education system was developed to educate the nation's youth by providing them with the knowledge to be the nation's next leaders and continue to build the country to greater heights. Unfortunately, this ideal was developed solely for the youth of European descent and not for those of African descent. As the country continued to develop, this state of being continued in various forms but still only favored those of European descent, which are now identified as white.

When Africans were brought to this country as slaves, they were stripped of their cultures, languages, belief systems, and history among other things. They were forced into a system of bondage, ignorance, and exploitation. Nothing but mere commodities for bartering, selling, and trading. Most notably, slaves were forced by owners to be uneducated by not affording them the opportunity to read or learn in a formal school setting.

Long after President Lincoln's Emancipation Proclamation and Civil War in the 1860's that were meant to free African slaves from bondage throughout the United States - specifically the southern states - the fight of educating African Americans continued through the next century. African Americans longed to learn how to read, and after being freed at the conclusion of the Civil War, schools were established for African American children. "Separate but equal" was the term commonly used during this time period to justify segregation. As with everything else that was segregated like hospitals, hotels, restaurants, and even water fountains, many schools in the South were separate but not equal. In the realm of education, the funding and support for schools educating African American students was ill-favored at best.

Such was the status quo even through the Civil Rights Movement in the 1950s and 1960s. It was not until the integration of all public and private facilities, including schools, that it was

mandated by the federal government that white and African American students began to learn together. This apparently afforded African American students the same educational opportunities as their white counterparts. Unfortunately, many whites moved to more suburban and affluent neighborhoods where few African Americans could afford to live. The move of whites to these new areas, leaving behind African Americans and poor whites, is known as white flight. Consequently, when they migrated so did their tax dollars that were used to fund local education systems. This was explained by Wade (2017) when he wrote the following about Los Angeles: "With declining opportunity, social unrest, and disenfranchised schools, the flight of whites and in fact any race that can climb out of the disenfranchised zone, continues. These migratory resources lead to shifting tax resources, creating gentrification and stratification of social class (p.142).

Today, this segregation of race as well as funding resources are main components of the educational achievement gap in which white students achieve at higher levels than African American students. In southern states like Alabama, schools composed of a majority African American student body have maintained the achievement gap with students being educated in older school buildings with not only fewer financial resources but also with fewer physical resources. Many of these schools reside in the Black Belt region of the state where there is still a strong concentration of African Americans that descended from slaves. These students and their families also must contend with the lack of jobs, substandard living conditions, and living at or below the poverty line (Jensen, 2009).

Such is the case of the school in this study. It resides in a Black Belt county that has a couple of counties to the North in which there are several county and city school districts that have large white and minority student populations in which there are significantly larger tax

bases to fund education, as opposed to the school and county in this study. The area where this case study was conducted is surrounded on the South, East, and West by similar counties in the Black Belt that have large minority populations which are primarily products of the remaining descendants of slaves and later segregation. Because of the fertile soil, there are many farms in the area that still grow cotton, soy beans, and other commodities that are farmed my machines instead of the sore hands of slaves. Additionally, symbols of slavery struggles such as many of the tall ceiling plantation styled homes reminiscent of the era still stand.

Despite the lack of funding and racial diversity in many schools located in the Alabama Black Belt, there are some that manage to garner high levels of achievement despite the hindrances. As students matriculate to high school, it becomes increasingly difficult to identify schools with high numbers of impoverished minorities that achieve at high levels. Furthermore, the measurements used to identify high achievement, especially at the high school level, are ever-morphing enigmas that continue to benefit predominately white schools despite various policies and legislations. This case study used graduation results over a four-year period to determine high achievement as opposed to racially biased standardized assessment results and college entrance data that does not account for students that enter the military or those that are intelligent enough to go to college but choose not to do so.

The Problem

The disproportionate and blatant racial bias of educating today's students is fraught with many direct and indirect obstacles from which education systems seem to have very little control. Some of the most noticeable obstacles are the education reform efforts and laws that have shaped the education system over the last several decades. These efforts include "the Civil Rights Act of 1964; The Effective Schools Movement of the 1970s and 80s; A Nation At Risk

Report, 1983; Standards and Accountability Movement of the 1990s; and The No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB), 2001" (Brown & Green, 2014, p. 2). Despite the intention to improve the education of America's students, the ongoing effort to do so still persists today. In some cases, these reform efforts and laws have simply stalled academic progress such as the disastrous implementation of NCLB, 2001 for which schools had to find other ways to better educate students (Moore, Kochan, Kraska, & Reames, 2011). The effects of such educational reform efforts are experienced nation-wide, but have had greater bearing on students learning in high-poverty, high-minority schools. Adversely, the aforementioned disproportionality and bias of educating favors those students that come from more affluent, white communities.

In addition to national and state education system laws and policies, Ladson-Billings (1998) identified curriculum, instruction, assessment, school funding, and desegregation as some of the tools used to implement and maintain the dominance of white cultures over all others. Under these conditions, students in high-poverty, high-minority schools are often unable to overcome social and educational barriers to excel academically, especially in schools located in the southern region of the United States (Fram, Miller-Cribbs, & Van Horn, 2007). The presence of white dominance also puts these students at a disadvantage when it comes to competing with students that attend schools located in more affluent school districts.

Students that are educated in the more affluent school districts containing a predominately white student body are reported to have several characteristics that improve the likelihood of student academic success. Delgado and Stefancic (2012) wrote that "most would agree that our system of white-over-color ascendancy serves important purposes, both psychic and material, for the dominant group" (p. 7). These schools are perceived to have more financial resources, more physical resources, better parental involvement, more well-behaved students, and better working

environments. On the other hand, it is argued that many high-poverty, high-minority schools possess lower numbers of students that perform well on standardized tests, lower graduation rates, higher student drop-out rates, higher numbers of novice teachers in the classrooms, lower parental involvement levels, and lower community support for academics.

To combat these characteristics the U.S. government implemented NCLB of 2001 which mandated that teachers be highly qualified, students pass some sort of high-stakes test or graduation exam, standardized test would be used to indicate annual yearly progress, and one hundred percent of students should be academically proficient upon graduating from high school (Abernathy, 2007). Again, the sole purpose of this legislation was to improve education for all students and close the achievement gap. Yet, it failed to do so in high-poverty, high-minority schools that lacked adequate funding to implement such a plan. Furthermore, if a school failed to achieve acceptable levels of annual yearly progress, federal funding could be withdrawn from those schools making their ability to adhere to NCLB mandates nearly impossible. In the years since NCLB has been replaced, academic achievement and graduation rates have reportedly gotten better. This was not the case for schools for which the Act was intended.

High-poverty, high-minority schools continued to struggle to adequately educate their students. Surprisingly, there are some instances where schools that educate with these characteristics are able to buck the trend of possessing low graduation rates and low academic achievement. These schools thrive academically in spite of possessing high numbers of students that live in poverty and a high numbers of minority students.

With education systems continuously going through reformations, it is important to discover how and why some high-poverty, high-minority schools are becoming high-achieving schools. According to the literature, the majority of research studies have been focused primarily

on high-poverty, high-minority elementary and middle schools. There is a very limited number of research articles that report on the successes of high-poverty, high-minority, high-achieving high schools. This is due to many of the high schools not meeting the requirement of having a high percent of their student body applying for and getting free or reduced lunches. Most studies utilize free or reduced lunch percentages around ninety percent. In many high schools that may be identified as high-poverty, many students decline to participate in free or reduced lunch programs due to the stigma attached to being poor as they get older (Clotfelter, Ladd, Vigdor & Wheeler, 2006).

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this case study is to identify how a high school in rural Alabama built an environment that possessed the characteristics of being a high-poverty, high-minority, high-achieving school. The student test scores consistently increased over the past few years, there is still a majority African American student population, and there is no stigma among the high school students that receive free or reduced lunch. Currently, research efforts have primarily examined high-poverty, high-minority, high-achieving elementary and middle schools. Consequently, there is relatively little documentation of high-poverty, high-minority, high-achieving high schools. This research will not only add valuable data to this body of work especially when it comes to developing a high-poverty, high-minority, high-achieving high school, but it will also add to data pertaining to student achievement in a poor, rural school setting. Because of the disproportionality and bias of the education efforts against minorities and the impoverished, the Critical Race Theory will be used as a lens for observing these educational disparities.

Theoretical Framework

The inception of the Critical Race Theory was the result of the Civil Rights efforts stalling in the late 1960s. As the 1970's came about, many of the efforts of the Civil Rights Movement were beginning to be revoked and repealed. These Civil Rights legislations only provided African Americans with the basic rights that whites felt would not threaten or disrupt their way of life or the perceived dominance over the races (DeCuir & Dixson, 2004). The authors also mention white people operate in a state of colorblindness that "argues that society should be colorblind ignores the fact that inequity, inopportunity, and oppression are historical artifacts that will not easily be remedied by ignoring race in the contemporary society" (p. 29).

Harris (1993), another theorist, wrote about how being white as a privilege or property.

> Slavery linked the privilege of whites to the subordination of Blacks through a legal regime that attempted the conversion of Blacks into objects of property. Similarly, the settlement and seizure of Native American land supported white privilege through a system of property rights in land in which the 'race' of the Native Americans rendered their first possession rights invisible and justified conquest. This racist formulation embedded the fact of white privilege into the very definition of property, marking another stage in the evolution of the property interest in whiteness. Possession – the act necessary to lay the basis for rights in property – was defined to include only the cultural practices of whites. This definition laid the foundation for the idea that whiteness – that which whites alone possess – is valuable and is property. (p. 1721)

In response, many people based in the legal field began to develop theories to help combat the prominence of racism in the United States. The Critical Race Theory has only been applied to the education field in recent years to best describe and help to better understand the role race

plays in education. Gillborn (2005) stated, "Race equity has constantly had to fight for legitimacy as a significant topic for education policy makers. This is a key part of the way in which education policy is implicated in white supremacy" (p. 14). In opposition, the increased utilization of the Critical Race Theory has been used to stimulate education reform and to litigate white privilege, social norms, and other means of race relations (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012; Taylor, E. 1999).

The purposes of integrating Critical Race Theory into this research is to promote the idea that race still matters in education, that race is still a mechanism of minority suppression, and that the plight of minorities in educations still needs to be understood by the majority to facilitate change. We must acknowledge that race is an integral part of our past and continues to shape the present and future of education. This dissertation is an effort to uncover what society seems to want to smother, and that is rural minority students are not backward-thinking descendants of slaves that lack the wherewithal to succeed. They are very capable to be academically successful, and with the same resources as their white counterparts, they may even be able to supersede expectations.

Research Question

How does a high-minority, high-poverty school in the Rural Black Belt of Alabama garner high student achievement?

Delimitations

1. There were more than 400 students that graduated in the years observed in this study, and because they were easy to contact, certain participants were chosen in a methodic manner to participate in the research effort.

2. There has been significant administrative turnover in the past decade at Lynnewood High School (pseudonym), so only the current administration team was interviewed.
3. The research focused on how people reflect on Lynnewood High School, and not solely on the academic prowess of its students.

Definition of Terms:

90-90-90 schools – Schools characterized by the presence of at least 90 percent of the student body being ethnic minorities or non-Anglo, at least 90 percent receiving free or reduced lunch, and at least 90 percent mastery on or passing ratio on standardized tests (Reeves, 2005).

Alabama Black Belt – A string of counties through the middle of Alabama that were known for their rich, black topsoil and later for the very large African American population that were descendants of slaves that lived on plantations there.

Blue Ribbon Schools of Excellence – they are elementary, middle, or secondary schools that are recognized by the United States Department of Education for making significant strides to close the achievement gap between white and minority students (Brown & Green 2014).

Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 (ESEA) – It was the first Legislative Act put in place by congress in which one of the purposes was to infuse federal dollars into the nation's education system to attempt to close the education gap between whites and minorities (Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965).

Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) – Passed in 2015 by the President Obama administration, it is the latest iteration of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act that provides educational funding to disadvantaged schools (ESEA1965, as amended by Every Student Succeeds Act of 2016).

Failing school – Is a school that is labeled such by the Alabama State Legislators which does not exclusively serve a special population of students and is listed in the lowest six percent of all public K-12 schools based on the state standardized assessment in reading and math (Alabama Accountability Act of 2013).

High-poverty, high-minority schools – Schools that have an exceptional number of student that receive free or reduced lunch and significantly more minority students than non-white students (Clotfelter, Ladd, Vigdor & Wheeler, 2006).

High-poverty, high-minority, high-achieving (HPMA) schools – Schools that have an exceptional number of students that receive free or reduced lunch, significantly more minority students than non-white students, and have a graduation rate above the state average.

No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) – Passed by the President George W. Bush administration in 2001, it is a previous version of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act that provides educational funding to disadvantaged schools prior to ESSA (Abernathy, 2007).

Teacher Quality – It is determined by the highest level of education the teachers obtain, the quality of the undergraduate institution in which the degree is obtained, and the amount of teaching experience obtained (Jackson, 2009).

Title I – It is a particular federal resource that is a part of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act in which federal funds are provided to high-poverty schools (Van der Klaauw, 2007).

Torchbearer Schools – These are schools identified by the Alabama State Department of Education that have at least an 80% poverty rate, perform at the top 20 percent of state administered standardized test, have at least a 95 percent participation rate in the "all students"

subgroup and all applicable ESEA subgroups, and a graduation rate above the state average (Alabama Education News, 2014).

White-wash – It is the process by which culture is holistically bleached to promote a dominant version of societal norms and history in addition to school academics and curricula (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012).

Table1: List of Acronyms

Abbreviations	Words
ACT	American College Testing
AFDC	Aid to Families with Dependent Children
ALSDE	Alabama State Department of Education
ARMPT	Alabama Reading and Mathematics Test
AYP	Annual Yearly Progress
CLS	Critical Legal Studies
CRT	Critical Race Theory
ESEA, 1965	Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965
ESSA, 2015	Every Student Succeeds Act of 2015
HPMA Schools	High-Poverty, High-Minority, High-Achieving Schools
IRB	Institutional or Internal Review Board
NCLB, 2001	No Child Left Behind Act of 2001
RGG	Recent Graduate Group
SES	Socioeconomic Status
SLT	School Leadership Team
TFA	Teach for America

CHAPTER TWO: A LITERATURE REVIEW

Critical Race Theory

Critical Race Theory (CRT) is a theoretical framework that was created to address "many of the same issues that conventional civil rights and ethnic studies discourses take up, but places them on a broader perspective that includes economics, history, context, group- and self-interest, and even feelings and the unconscious" (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012, p. 3). Unlike the conventional civil rights and ethnic studies discourses, CRT was developed to address the "subtler forms of racism" (p. 4). Although it seems that the goal of CRT is to critique the dominant culture, it is not. The goal is actually to highlight and expose the oppression of minorities.

CRT did not merely appear in literature. Theoretically, CRT is a byproduct of another paradigm called Critical Legal Studies (CLS) which is still utilized by scholars today. The focus of CLS is to analyze law as it pertains to the social and cultural progress of individuals and groups in the United States. CLS scholars also challenge socially accepted connotations and stereotypes that lend to classism and other oppressive social hierarchies. But, that is where CLS stops. It only challenges and makes light of oppressive social structures instead of developing strategies to facilitate social change. Furthermore, and most notably, CLS "failed to include racism in it critique. Thus, CRT became a logical outgrowth of the discontent of legal scholars of color" (Ladson-Billings, 1998, p. 12).

CRT is not a concrete theoretical framework or methodology in which all theorists and critics must follow. It is somewhat malleable to the concerns of the theorists. Nevertheless, there are two common interests in which CRT scholars subscribe. First, is to understand how whites have managed to create and stay in positions of power while African Americans and other

minorities are trapped as subordinates. Second, is "to change the bond that exists between law and racial power" (Ladson-Billings, 1998, p. 14). CRT theorist not only share these two common interests, but many also subscribe to the tenants of CRT.

Tenants of CRT

According to Delgado and Stefancic (2012) there are several basic tenants of CRT. The first tenant is that racism is a normal, ordinary everyday occurrence. It is a factor in the way business, politics, education, and both private and public entities are conducted (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012; Ladson-Billings, 2013). Ladson-Billings and Tate (1995) asserted that "race continues to be a significant factor in determining inequity in the United States" (p. 48). Adversely in the realm of the social sciences, theories pertaining to race have not been pertinent or deemed significant enough for research.

Second, is the interest convergence tenant. In this tenant, it is believed that those mostly in control of today's society, namely whites, do not make decisions benefiting African Americans unless it benefits them in some fashion. Thus, African American activists and politicians must find ways to align their interests with those of whites in order to facilitate awareness and change in minority communities (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012; Ladson-Billings, 2013). The argument of making decisions that primarily benefit whites is strengthened by the next tenant.

The third tenant of CRT perceives race as a social construction thesis. "Biologists, geneticists, anthropologists, and sociologists all agree that race is not a scientific reality" (Ladson-Billings, 2013, p. 38). So, the idea of race and other social categories such as eyes, hair, height, weight, and so on, are social constructs developed by society to form a hierarchy that typically places whites at the top although genetically all human being are essentially identical

(Delgado & Stefancic, 2012; Ladson-Billings, 2013). Yet, the abundance of these and other social categories tend to intersect.

Fourth is the intersectionality and anti-essentialism tenant. Every person on this earth is not identified by race alone. There is a plethora of identities, such as "race, gender, sexuality, ability, religion, and many more," that intersect and place individuals in multiple categories (Ladson-Billings, 2013, p. 39). This is intersectionality. Essentialism is the belief that people belonging to a particular group, like African Americans, Asians, gays, males, and/or females, all act the same, think the same, and have the same belief systems. This is the basis on which stereotypes are conjured and sustained.

The last tenant is the voice or counter-narrative. "Critical race theorists have built on everyday experiences with perspective, viewpoint, and the power of stories to persuasion to come to a deeper understanding of how Americans see race" (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012, p. 44). Furthermore, they "use parables, chronicles, stories, counterstories, poetry, fiction, and revisionist histories to illustrate the false necessity and irony of much of current civil rights doctrine" (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995, p. 57). More specifically, it is the use of counterstories that is the preferred method that gives a voice to one's own reality. Counterstories provide a counter-narrative of what is believed to be true by others, especially whites. In other words, it provides stories of truth, not misconceptions and falsehoods, as experienced by African Americans and other minorities to provide a counter story of what society believes (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012; Ladson-Billings, 1999).

Per Ladson-Billings and Tate (1995), "A growing number of education scholars of color are raising critical questions about the way that research is being conducted in communities of color. Thus, without the authentic voices of people of color (as teachers, parents, administrators,

students, and community members) it is doubtful that we can say or know anything useful about education in their communities," and it is "the 'voice' component of Critical Race Theory [that] provides a way to communicate the experience and realities of the oppressed, a first step on the road to justice" (p. 58). One's voice give credence to the perspectives and realities of minorities as it relates to race relations. A community without a voice, like those of the past African American slave communities, is vulnerable to suppression and control by other races. Ironically, it was from African American slave communities in which their voice was developed using stories about their family history, slavery, and overcoming adversity.

Consequently, it has been vitally important in minority communities that stories be told and handed down from one generation to the next. Among minority communities, these stories function as a tool to give a voice to the systematic silencing of racial discrimination. They also function as a way for minorities to make comparisons in experiences in order to identify and combat discriminations (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012).

Having a voice is one of the most powerful tools minorities have to advance racial and social equality, and storytelling in minority communities cannot be controlled or censored by outside forces. Yet, there are outside forces, or critics, that downplay and scrutinize storytelling especially as a tool for CRT. Delgado and Stefancic (2012) cite several reasons critics oppose storytelling as a relevant means to address CRT. First, the stories told may not represent the demographic group from which the teller is a member and is merely efforts to seek attention or sympathy. Second, critics believe that it "lacks analytical rigor" because the stories are subjective and are subject to various interpretations (p. 91). Third, they believe that any debate and discussion brought forth by those that best understand the issues are muffled due to the nature of storytelling. In other words, critics believed that those that tell stories of an experience

dealing with race can be effectively delivered by people of other races, namely whites. Conversely, critical race theorists believe that whites should not be discouraged from telling or writing stories, but they believe that the stories are best told by the minorities who experienced or witnessed events dealing with racial adversity. Fourth, critics believe that CRT lacks objective truth, which is a means of discrediting the truth as experienced by minorities (Delgado and Stefancic, 2012).

The Roots of Critical Race Theory

Critical Race Theory's inception and reason for existence bears roots spanning long before African Americans were viewed as citizens, long before they could possess property, and long before being enslaved to be shipped across the seas. To fully understand the gravity and weight of CRT, it is necessary to review these aspects that lead up to the birth and proliferation of CRT.

When Africans were transported to the Americas in the bellies of slave ships, they were designated as property of European descendants that had begun to inhabit the Americas. The budding government would solidify the rights of whites to own African American slaves through the development of laws. Equally, laws were also developed to stunt and even completely prevent the proliferation of knowledge, rights, and self-awareness of African American slaves (Tate, 1997). Such was the status of African Americans even after the conclusion of the Civil War, which affectively ended slavery, and into the establishment of segregation (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012).

African Americans were no longer slaves, but became second-class citizens to their white counterparts. The "separate-but-equal" phrase and doctrine, which came about as a result of both the Equal Protection Clause of the Fourteenth Amendment and the *Plessy v. Ferguson* ruling,

was the law of the land. Richardson and Luker (2014) detailed this event by stating the following:

> In an eight-to-one decision, the U.S. Supreme Court in the Civil Rights Cases (1883) held that the Fourteenth Amendment did not apply to racial discrimination by private entities and the U.S. Congress had no power under the Fourteenth Amendment to adopt civil rights legislation. This gave free reign to private business to establish segregation with no legal recourse for African Americans. In *Plessey v. Ferguson* (1896), the Supreme Court codified segregation and the doctrine 'separate but equal' into the U.S. legal system. (p. 182)

The separate-but-equal status provided African Americans with schools, restaurants, along with other meager social amenities and opportunities that were underfunded, in poor working condition, and supported only by the poor African American communities (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012). Further, Ladson-Billings (1998) stated that "in *Plessy v. Ferguson* the high court once again denied full citizenship rights to African Americans as a way to assert white property rights – rights to use and enjoyment and the absolute right to exclude" (p. 19).

After segregation in schools was outlawed due to the unanimous Supreme Court ruling on the *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954) case, schools across the nation were forced to allow students of color to learn with their white counterparts (Richardson & Luker, 2014). In 1955 a second ruling of Brown v. Board of Education enforced segregation by giving the courts the power to "consider problems related to administration, arising from physical condition of the school plant, the school transportation system, personnel, revision of school district and attendance areas into compact units to achieve a system of determining admission to the public schools on a nonracial basis" (*Brown v. Board of Education, 1955*). Of course, many whites were outraged and voiced their frustrations. But, some silently took action by sending their children to

private schools, to magnet schools for high performing students, and by moving their families to areas where non-whites could not afford to live. These actions of moving white children away from schools with increasing numbers of African Americans and other minorities is known as white flight. More recently, white flight has been disguised as the "insistence on vouchers, public funding of private schools, and schools of choice" (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995, p. 60). Furthermore, not only was desegregation the cause of white flight, but it was also the cause of the decrease of African American teacher and administrator positions (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995).

Considering this time period, Delgado and Stefancic (2012) wrote "Critical Race Theory sprang up in the 1970s, as a number of lawyers, activists, and legal scholars across the country realized, more or less simultaneously, that the heady advances of the civil rights era of the 1960s had stalled and, in many respects, were being rolled back" (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012, p. 4). To address these changes in the fight for equal rights and to prevent the social gains of African Americans from being rolled back, the emerging writers of theories in this respect were Derrick Bell, Alan Freeman, and Richard Delgado. Later contributors included "Kimberlé Crenshaw, Angela Harris, Charles Lawrence, Mari Matsuda, and Patricia Williams [as] major figures as well" (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012, p. 6). Derrick Bell, named the Father of CRT due to his self-understanding, writings, and proliferation of the study of law in reference to African Americans, along with these other contributors constructed the foundation of the newest movement in law discourse known as CRT.

Although born out of the civil rights movement, CRT does not address race and racism in the same manner. The civil rights movement strived to change the social constructs of race by attempting to change "the system of images, words, attitudes, unconscious feelings, scripts, and

social teachings by which we convey to one another that certain people are less intelligent, reliable, hardworking, virtuous, and American than others" (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012, p. 21). CRT takes on more of a "realist" point of view that holds "racism is much more than a collection of unfavorable impressions of members of other groups…. Racism is a means by which society allocates privilege and status" (p. 21). Privileges and statuses, in this case, include elite jobs, job benefits, social benefits, schools, favorable living conditions, and neighborhoods. It was because of both the past and more recent events in the African American history that CRT was developed and continues to be a tool of scholarly discourse although its primary focus pertains to race.

The Migration of CRT in Education

In the scholarly discourse of CRT in law, "lawyers use Critical Race Theory techniques to advocate on behalf of clients and to expose bias within the system" (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012, p. 113). In education, the effort of CRT is to theorize race and de-trivialize the effects of race relations and to give a voice to the voiceless, oppressed minority students (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). Ladson-Billings, Tate, Omi, and Winant are credited with "attempting to uncover or decipher the social-structural and cultural significance of race in education" (p. 50).

The first public introduction of CRT by Ladson-Billings and Tate in 1994 was met with significant resistance from both allies and critics (Ladson-Billings, 2013). After much vetting of the research they presented, they published their first article ahead of any allies or critics. In the following years Ladson-Billings and Tate were visited by the initial CRT developers Derrick Bell, Kimberlé Crenshaw, and Richard Delgado to talk about the development of CRT in education. Of the three, Bell expressed the most caution. On the other hand, Crenshaw encouraged the proliferation of CRT in education. Delgado was very interested in collaborating because he believed CRT in law had reached an apex, and he felt that CRT in education was the

next logical avenue. This set the groundwork for "attracting many young scholars who were looking for new ways to think about their work and new methodologies for race scholarship" (p. 36).

Prior to utilizing CRT in educational research, Ladson-Billings and Tate (1995) felt that there was no theory to best describe how race plays a part in education. To fill this void and theorize race in education, the authors developed CRT as a matter of scholarly inquiry. This new methodology of scholarly inquiry was developed to challenge the idea that all students were afforded equal educational opportunities, such as "curriculum, instruction, funding, and facilities as white students" (Ladson-Billings, 1998, p. 21). The theorist also asserted that addressing equal educational opportunities was not enough and that other past inequities, such as employment, admission to a college of choice, and housing opportunities, needed to be addressed as well. She identified five areas in the education system in which CRT can be vigorously utilized to address past educational inequities: curriculum, instruction, assessment, school funding, and desegregation.

The United States education system uses curriculum to script and white-wash history to make the histories of people of Color seem insignificant, therefore bolstering and shrewdly maintaining white dominance. Historically, the achievements and "stories of African Americans [have been] muted and erased when they challenge dominant culture authority and power" (Ladson-Billings, 1998, p. 21). Yet, "it is not just the distortions, omissions, and stereotypes of school curriculum content that must be considered, it also is the rigor of the curriculum and access to what is deemed 'enriched' curriculum via courses and classes for the gifted and talented" (p. 22).

CRT theorists believe school instruction is a scheme in which white students are able to effectively navigate while it is assumed that African American students will have difficulty accomplishing the same tasks. This leads teachers of high-minority schools into a cycle of strategies, techniques, and professional development that all claim to fix the failures of their students. To this end, instruction should not be a mandated, generic procedure for all teachers to administer; it should be diversified and explicitly cater to the racial, social, and educational needs of minorities (Ladson-Billings, 1998).

According to CRT theorists, assessments serve as a gage for white dominance and a gage for African American intelligence deficiencies. In other words, it is theorized "if working-class whites are 'achieving' at a higher level that Blacks, then they feel relatively superior" (Ladson-Billings, 1998, p. 23). When coupled with subpar curricula, flawed instruction, living in poverty, and the physical conditions of schools, assessments usually produce poor African American assessment results (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). The primary critique here is that assessments usually tell us what students do not know instead of what they do know and can do. This is best expressed when Carter G. Woodson (2000) noted "the same educational process which inspires and stimulates the oppressor with the thought that he is everything and has accomplished everything worthwhile, depresses and crushes at the same time the spark of genius in the Negro by making him feel that race does not amount to much and never will measure up to the standards of other people" (p. xix).

Not exempt from CRT criticism, public school funding, which derives primarily from property taxes, has not equitably benefited African American and other minority students as it has benefited white students. Ladson-Billings (1998) argued that CRT's position on school funding inequality "is a function of institutional and structural racism. The inability of African

Americans to qualify for educational advancements, jobs, and mortgages creates a cycle of low educational achievement, underemployment and unemployment, and substandard housing" (p. 24). Consequently, the effects of school funding not only affect African Americans as students but also as adults.

A counterargument for equitable school funding is that the difference in per pupil spending from one school district to the next does not matter. Yet, many high-poverty, high-minority schools are overcrowded old buildings devoid of both adequately functioning bathrooms and heating and air units. Such conditions are not conducive for learning and CRT theorists argue that "if money doesn't matter, then why spend it on the rich" (Ladson-Billings, 1998, p. 23)?

Like the funding issue, it may be difficult for many to believe that desegregation is still an issue in the United States let alone in its education system. Title IV of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 legally enacted desegregation in all entities including diners, buses, schools, gas stations, hotels, entertainment venues, libraries, parks, and swimming pools (Richarson & Luker, 2014). Although African Americans were legally emancipated, whites still used the legal system to facilitate other means of segregation. As stated under The Roots of CRT section, Ladson-Billings and Tate (1995) mention voucher programs, funding for private schools, and school choice as methods of segregation. Further, the legal system also employed redrawing voting district lines to suppress the power of the African American vote and diminish the value of their properties.

Race and Property

It was proposed by theorists Ladson-Billings and Tate (1995) that the United States society as a whole is still based on property rights. With African slaves labeled as property, the notion that human rights and property rights comingled harmoniously was a misnomer. Historically in this country the American Indians, Asians, Mexicans, and even some European groups have been

ostracized and outcast from lands that were concurred by Europeans. Consequently, "the ability to define, possess, and own property has been a central feature of power in America" (p. 53).

As previously stated, biologically all humans are the same which leads to biologist concluding that race is useless in research. But, this is not biology. "Race has become metaphorical – a way of referring to and distinguishing forces, events, classes, and expressions of social decay and economic division far more threatening to the body politic than biological 'race' ever was," and to deny that race matters "denies the reality of a racialized society and its impact on 'raced' people in their everyday lives" (Ladson-Billings and Tate, 1995, p. 48-49).

It is argued by Tate (1997), that "in 1786, the framers of the Constitution laid the legal groundwork for a white-Black binary opposition by (a) counting Blacks as three fifths of a person, (b) delaying for 20 years the effective date for outlawing the slave trade, and (c) obligating the government to uphold fugitive slave laws and to use its troops to end Black insurrections and violence. Thus, by constitutional law, the federal government was legally empowered to support a cultural ethos of African American inferiority manifested as slavery" (p. 200-201). Ladson-Billings (1998) further iterates that "African Americans represented a particular conundrum because not only were they not accorded individual civil rights because they were not white and owned no property, but they were constructed as property" (p. 17). Moreover, "African Americans represent a unique form of citizen in the United States – property transformed into citizen" (p. 19).

In education, property is not just a descriptor of the land one owns, the material things one possesses, or even the race, gender, and class of a person. Property, especially land, takes on a monetary function in the form of property taxes. Property taxes are the primary, local source of public funding for school systems. As a result, property possesses higher values in more affluent

locations. Therefore, the amount of taxes assessed and collected from the affluent areas for the education systems is higher. These affluent residents typically "resent paying for a public school system whose clientele is largely non-white and poor" leading to the notion that "those with 'better' property are entitled to 'better' schools" (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995, p. 53-54). Essentially, this means that those from the more affluent areas are opposed to having their taxes fund schools which their children do not attend leaving those in poor school districts with little funding to advance educational needs.

Typically, these "better" schools have the ability to procure "better" school buildings as well as "better" school curricula. In this sense, curriculum becomes a function of intellectual property in which "the quality and quantity of the curriculum varies with the 'property values' of the school" (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995, p. 54). In other words, when the property value is high, more funds are funneled to the local schools to be used for providing students with enhanced educational opportunities, and the adverse is true for high poverty areas and schools. These property issues may not seem like inequalities based on race but on funding. That is until one considers that African Americans make up about 12 percent [currently 13.3 percent] of the population but makes up the largest student population in the nation's largest school districts (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995).

One's reputation is also a concept of property. When someone defames another person's character, they have damaged the assailed person's personal property. In the case of race, when a white person is identified as Black or African American, the reputational status of that person becomes damaged. The same is true when identifying where people live and get an education. Ladson-Billings and Tate (1995) wrote that "the term urban, the root word of urbane had come to mean black. Thus, urban schools (located in the urbane, sophisticated cities) lack the status and

reputation of suburban (white) schools and when urban students move to or are bussed to suburban schools, these schools lose their reputation" (p. 60).

In our society, being white is associated with purity and freedom from contamination of African American blood and culture (Delgado and Stefancic, 2012). The authors also noted of whiteness being property by stating "other groups, such as American Indians, Latinos, Asian Americans, and African Americans, are described as non-white. That is, they are defined in relation or opposition to whiteness – that which they are not" (p. 84). Being white is a function of property in which "whiteness" owns the rights to use, possess, move, and exclude (DeCuir & Dixson, 2004).

Possessing whiteness as a property inevitably gives way to white privilege. According to Delgado & Stefancic (2012) "white privilege refers to the myriad of social advantages, benefits, and courtesies that come with being a member of the dominant race" (p. 87). According to Peggy McIntosh (1988), a significant white anti-racism activist that focused on feminism and white privilege, defines it as "an invisible weightless knapsack of special provisions, maps, passports, codebooks, visas, clothes, tools, and blank checks" in which whites are able to take advantage of but are also consciously unaware (p. 30). White privilege is most notable in law, whereas whites are given lighter punishments for the same crimes committed by minorities, and in the workforce, whereas whites are afforded greater job opportunities. Hence the creation of affirmative action. Ironically, some whites perceive affirmative action as a form a reverse discrimination in which they are victimized not for their qualifications but for being white (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012).

Fight to Delegitimize Race in CRT

The crux of CRT is the strong and almost solitary focus on race. With many scholars arguing the legitimacy and usefulness of race as a primary scholarly research focus, society itself tries to deny that race is a factor and that race impacts the lives of all citizens. It is also argued by CRT critics that theorizing about race without acknowledging class and gender does not provide a full picture of the inequities that are present between whites and other races (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995).

Another method and thought process used in the effort to delegitimize the subject and importance of race is the liberalism framework. Delgado & Stefancic (2012) believe liberals are stark believers and supporters of color blindness when it comes to race relations. Not to be misunderstood, they do believe in equal treatment of all people. The issue is that when considering equal treatment, liberals disregard people's histories and current life events. Such actions are efforts to downplay race issues unless they are egregious in nature. Critical race theorists believe that by addressing all race issues, no matter how minor, will alleviate the status of minorities as subordinates and increase empathy from the majority. They also believe that only color-conscious and forceful efforts to acknowledge and change all racial unconventionalities will alleviate the angst of minorities.

High-Minority, High-Poverty, High-Achieving Schools

In recent decades, many of the schools that reside in high-poverty, high-minority areas that experience the torment of racial unconventionalities have been labeled as failing schools (Brown & Green, 2014). These schools are not limited to one particular area of the United States and occur in both rural and urban areas. Unfortunately, there has been a string of legislation that has not helped with the effort to decrease the number of failing schools nation-wide. The most recent

legislation is the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) of 2015. Prior to the ESSA, the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB), was a piece of legislation that was created to help both the education gap and the number of students falling behind in school (Abernathy, 2007). In spite of the difficulty of adhering to the demands of such legislation, many schools have managed to produce students that have excelled academically. Not to say that students that live in poverty are unable to succeed, but there are schools that have managed to have a majority of student excel academically in spite of high numbers of students living in poverty and being minorities. These types of schools bear several names, but the one used for this study will be high-poverty, high-minority, high-achieving (HPMA) schools. Although the term HPMA schools will be used, the one term that is most common is the 90-90-90 schools (Kearney & Herrington, 2010; Kearney, Herrington, & Aguilar, 2012).

A 90-90-90 school is characterized by the presence of at least 90 percent of the student body being ethnic minorities or non-Anglo, at least 90 percent receiving free or reduced lunch, and at least 90 percent mastery on or passing ratio on standardized tests (Kearney & Herrington, 2010; Kearney, Herrington, & Aguilar, 2012). The other terms used by researchers that are closely related to the 90-90-90 moniker are Blue Ribbon Schools of Excellence, and High-performing, High-poverty schools. Blue Ribbon Schools of Excellence are both private and public schools located throughout the nation that have made significant strides to close the education gap between white and disadvantaged minority students. Blue Ribbon Schools are recognized by the United States Department of Education at the elementary, middle, and high school levels (Brown & Green 2014).

According to Alabama Education News (2014), Torchbearer Schools identified by the Alabama Department of Education must meet all of the following criteria in order to qualify for torchbearer status:

1) Have at least 80 percent poverty rate (percent free/reduced meals)
2) Must be among the top 20 percent band of the state using proficiency of the Alabama Reading and Mathematics Test (ARMT+), the Alabama High School Graduation Exam and Alabama Alternate Assessment for Level III and for Level IV
3) Have above state average of students scoring Level IV on both reading and mathematics sections of the Alabama Reading and Mathematics Test (ARMT+)
4) Have at least a 95 percent participation rate in the "all students" subgroup and all applicable Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) subgroups
5) Have a high school graduation rate above the state average.

Throughout the literature, the high-performing, high-poverty label is used by researchers to identify schools possessing such characteristics and are not recognized by a local, state, or national entities. According to Kannapel, Clements, Taylor, and Hibpshman (2005), Brown and Green (2014), and Carter (2000) high-performing, high-poverty schools must possess certain criteria to be labeled as high-performing, high-poverty schools. The first criteria was that the schools had to have a state accountability index score of 80 or higher. The second criteria was that the free or reduced lunch percentage of students at each school had to be at or exceed the state average of 50 percent for elementary schools, 40 percent for middle schools, and 35 percent for high schools. The third criteria was that the schools had to possess an academic index of at least 75 in conjunction with the desired percentage of students receiving free or reduced lunch and a large presence of minorities. Fourth, the schools had to demonstrate a pattern of progress

over time. Lastly, the achievement gap between non-free or reduced lunch and free or reduced lunch students, as well as the achievement gap between white and minority students, had to be less than 15 points.

Locations of High-Minority, High-Poverty, High-Achieving Schools

Considering the various iterations of HPMA schools, one may believe they could only occur in certain parts of the nation. The research conducted suggests that these types of schools occur in both rural and urban areas where minority families reside. Brown and Green (2014) conducted a study of teachers in Blue Ribbon Schools across various states throughout the nation. The authors reported that the phenomenon of failing schools with the majority of its students living in poverty not only exists in rural areas, but are present in urban and suburban areas as well. Poverty, despite one's race, is not optional and is not a demographic that people elect or strive to be a part of. But with suburban areas having an abundance of affluent and resourceful parents to help their children succeed, the majority of the failing schools reside in rural and urban areas.

Baker and Cooper (2005) performed their high-poverty research in consolidated metropolitan areas because of the prevalence of diverse communities, schools, and labor markets. Kannapel et al. (2005) observed high performing, high-poverty schools in the State of Kentucky that were located in both urban and rural areas. Apart from the rural and urban setting, HPMA schools are located all over the United States. The following chart outlines the grade levels and locations of the schools observed by the researchers covered in this literature review. This is important because the information and data that will derive from my dissertation will be garnered from a high school in the Black Belt of Alabama from which there is little identified or published research.

Table 2: Previously Researched High-Poverty/High-Minority and HPMA Schools

Article Author(s) by Last Name	School levels involved in studies	Location
Brown & Green, 2014	Elementary Middle & High (collective analysis)	Nationwide
Clotfelter, Ladd, Vigdor, & 2007 (& Wheeler, 2006)	Elementary Middle & High (collective analysis)	North Carolina
Fram, Miller-Cribbs, & Van Horn, 2007	Elementary	U. S. South East
Guin, 2004	Elementary	Not specified
Jackson, 2009	Elementary Middle & High (collective analysis)	Charlotte, NC
Jarrett, Wasonga, & Murphy, 2010	High	Illinois
Kannapel, Clements, Taylor, & Hibpshman, 2005	Elementary	Lexington, KY
Kearney & Herrington, 2010 (& Aguilar 2012)	Elementary	South Central Texas
McDermott & Rothenberg, 2000	Elementary and Middle	New York State, Urban
Mertens & Flowers	Middle	Arkansas
Moore, Kochan, Kraska, & Reames, 2011	Elementary Middle & High (collective analysis)	Alabama
Murley, Keedy, & Welsh, 2008	Elementary	Kentucky
Palardy, 2013	High	Nationwide
Parrett & Budge, 2012	3 Elem, 1 Mid, 1 High, 1 K-8, &1 7-12	Minnesota; Northern Idaho; Portland, OR; Queens, NY; Westchester, NY; Washington State; Boise, ID
Picucci, Brownson, Kahlert, & Sobel, 2002	Middle	Huston, TX; Atlanta, GA; Utica, NY; Eagle Pass, TX; Pocomoke City, Maryland; Mount Vernon, KY; & Tonasket, WA
Ragland, Clubine, Constable, & Smith, 2002	5 Elementary	San Antonio, Edinburg, El Paso, Clute, & Houston, TX
Reddick, Welton, Alsandor, Denyszyn, & Platt, 2011	High	Texas
Reeves, 2003	Elementary Middle & High (collective analysis)	Norfolk, VA

External School Characteristics

Every school possesses its own internal and external characteristics that make it unique. HPMA schools are no exception. When it comes to closing the achievement gap and improving student achievement in such schools, there are many internal and external factors that are present in each school (Krovetz & Arriaza, 2006). Unavoidably, conditions and characteristics present outside of the physical school can affect what goes on inside of the school in both negative and positive ways. Students that attend schools located in high-poverty, high minority areas are especially vulnerable to the negative characteristics present outside the school campus. Yet, when the said schools possess high achievement rates, the negative conditions and characteristics are addressed by school personnel and overcome to improve student achievement in spite of opposition. Krovetz & Arriaza (2006) note several negative conditions and characteristics that are overcome by HPMA schools include but are not limited to the student condition, academic performance, parent and family support, as well as low income and poverty conditions. Because these three conditions are applicable to the school observed in the Alabama Black Belt for this dissertation, the conditions will be explained in detail.

Student Living Conditions

The first external condition outside of the physical school that affects student academic performance inside of the school is the conditions in which the students themselves live. Depending on where the HPMA schools are located in the United States, the makeup of the minority population in those schools varies. In reference to this dissertation, the observed school population is primarily composed of African American students. This is significant because "the dilemma of achievement is located in the society's ideology about African Americans' intellectual and cultural inferiority" (Perry, Steele, & Hilliard, 2003, p.78) and because "school is

organized so as to afford automatic advantages to those who come to school with a lot of cultural capital and disadvantages to those with little cultural capital" (p.85). Racism, rather it be deliberate or disguised, still exists and impacts how education is provided even when it is assumed that middle-class African American students no longer suffer any of the disadvantages of race.

Perry et al. (2003) noted that "African-American children go to K-12 schools in the post-Civil Rights era with little acknowledgement by teachers, administrators, and parents that they are being battered at every turn by the ideology of African-American inferiority. And if the presence of this ideology is acknowledged, usually little or nothing is done to buffer students from impact of this ideology and to develop in students the capacity to resist these assessments" (p.97). Thus, student conditions that work against their ability to succeed are not just limited by living in poverty and attending school with the majority of students being African American. The reach of adverse conditions spans into how others view African American children and how they act around the children. The adverse actions and views of the teachers, administrators, and parents can result in poor teacher attendance, poor student attendance, low academic performance, and low graduation rates specifically at the high school level (Brown & Green, 2014).

When it comes to African American students, Perry et al. (2003) contends that facilitating achievement for African American children in the post-Civil Rights era has been noted to be more complicated for several of the following reasons:

- Schools or spaces in schools are not intentionally organized to forge identities of African-American students as achievers.

- Schools provide few spaces that are intentionally designed to buffer African-American students from the day-to-day experience of racism in the school, and from the explicit and subtle impact of the ideology of Black intellectual inferiority.
- Schools are not likely to have a narrative that is counter to the 'narrative of openness and opportunity,' one that talks about Black achievement in the face of constraints and limits.
- Schools make few attempts to systematically organize occasions to create desire, to inspire hope, to develop and sustain effort optimism, or to intentionally create multiple contexts that socialize students to the behaviors that are necessary for them to be achievers.
- There is a conspiracy of silence about how racism in and out of school blunts effort optimism.
- African-American parents, as the first generation of African-Americans to experience racism and its impact on achievement in an allegedly 'open and integrated' society, might possibly not have figured out how to develop institutional formations and pass on psychological coping strategies to their children that responds to this new context. (p.100)

One student condition that is rarely considered is the ability of students and their families to manage the hidden costs of education. Abernathy (2007) wrote, "Most children go to school with children from families with similar incomes" (p. 19). Considering this idea that the wealthy learn together and the impoverished learn together, "the hidden cost of attending school often includes fees for participation in athletics, band, choir, and various clubs, as well as materials and supplies related to homework assignments, athletic uniforms, yearbooks, school pictures, social activities, and school supplies. Student who are poor usually do so without these aspects of school, which most students consider standard" (Parrett & Budge, 2012). On the other hand, high-performing,

high-poverty schools find ways to ensure that the students that live in poverty have opportunities to participate in extracurricular activities. The schools accomplish this by "waving fees, supplying equipment or instruments, covering the cost of uniforms, [and] providing transportation..." (p. 124).

When it comes to student success, another condition identified by Reddick, Welton, Alsander, Denyszyn, and Platt (2011) that is rarely considered is self-motivation. Many of the participants in their study had little guidance from others to ensure their academic success in high school. They faced negative and opposing influences inside and outside of the physical school. Despite the opposition, they still maintained an internal drive and motivation to change their lives through acquiring an education.

Parental and Family Support

Despite students' living and learning conditions, surely having strong parental and family support for a student's academic progress helps with increasing the likelihood of student success (Jensen, 2013; Kearney et al., 2012; and Parrett & Budge, 2012). Although pessimistic, parental and family support can affect student achievement in negative ways as well. In the high-poverty high school for which this dissertation is directed, exceptional parental and family support is evident at many sporting events held throughout the year. They faithfully pack into the football stadium and gymnasium any day of the week to cheer on the teams. Yet, academic programs and honors assemblies are scarcely attended by those same patrons. This may subconsciously place more importance on extracurricular activities rather than academics for the students being served.

Jensen (2009) stated that "although childhood is generally considered to be a time of joyful, carefree, exploration, children living in poverty tend to spend less time finding out about the

world around them and more time struggling to survive within it" (p. 8). With that in mind, it is no surprise that children from low-income homes have less parental and family support when it comes to academics. In contrast to the evidence that low-income parents and families do not support their children's educations, families who live in poverty actually care very much about education (Jensen, 2013; Kearney et al., 2012; and Parrett & Budge, 2012). The authors suggest that the parents care not only about education but more importantly they care about their children. It is this care for their children that drive parents to spend many hours at work with limited leave time, transportation, and childcare opportunities. All in all, these factors contribute to scarce opportunities for parents to be involved in their children's educations.

To fight this lack of involvement, high-performing, high-poverty schools find ways to get families involved and engaged in the overall education process of the schools in which their children attend. Some have even started marketing their school facilities as community centers to facilitate "clubs, parent support and education, early childhood activities, GED programs, advisory groups, community education classes, and a host of other events and activities" (Parrett & Budge, p. 132). This helps change the perception of what is expected to occur at a school and expands how the community looks to the school as a facilitation center.

In the McDermott and Rothenberg (2000) study, a focus group of teachers "thought the mobility of low-income urban people contributed to lack of parent involvement in school activities," and they also mentioned that this problem continued to increase year after year (p. 12). In contrast, the teachers and administrators in the Ragland et al. (2002) study decided to address the lack of parental involvement in order to reinforce classroom learning at home by creating parent liaison positions to "bridge the gap between school personnel and parents in some of the schools" (p.22). Teachers facilitated ongoing communication with parents to notify them

of successes and to ask for assistance in addressing their child's lack of success in the classroom. Communication not only came in the form of periodical phone calls but also by sharing home phone numbers between teachers and parents and by sending home daily homework folders with pertinent information pertaining to the student's academic progress.

Even though such actions may result in approving student achievement, it is not the end all be all. Perry et al. (2003) stated that "even if education leads to a good job, even if African American parents communicate clearly to their children that education pays off, these experiences can be neutralized if children experience school and the larger society as unfair and discriminatory" (p. 79). Much like the results from Ragland et al. divulged, the responsibility of insuring academic achievement among African American students does not solely lie with parents. The responsibility should be shared equitably among parents, the schools, worthwhile role models, and society as a whole. Reddick, Welton, Alsander, Denyszyn, and Platt (2011) wrote the "community – people, organizations, and resources outside of students' homes, tied to the local area – can provide capital in different ways," such as cultural, social, and community capital (p.609). These identified forms of capital led high-poverty, minority students in their study to acquire social and professional networks often associated with their more privileged counterparts, and in doing so, led them to successfully graduating high school and enrolling in college. These students obviously decided to go above and beyond what society expected of them.

Low Income and Poverty

West (1993) wrote about low income and poverty that "the urgent problem of black poverty is primarily due to the distribution of wealth, power, and income – a distribution influenced by the racial caste system that denied opportunities to most 'qualified' black people

[in the 1970s]" (p. 63). Living in poverty can undoubtedly prevent students from excelling academically, and since the school being observed for this dissertation is located in a low income, high-poverty area, it is important to understand what is poverty and low income. Poverty is defined as the lack of or limited acquisition of money, while low income is defined as the amount of family income that is below a designated cutoff point that is determined by certain funded programs and government entities (Parrett & Budge, 2012).

The low income "poverty threshold established by the U.S. government" is used as the determining factor for students' eligibility "for meal programs offered by the U.S. Department of Agriculture" (p. 40). According to the latest United States Census data, in 2015, 13.5 percent of the total U.S. population and 24.1 percent of the total African American U.S. population lived below the national poverty line, and for the average three-person household, the average poverty threshold is set at $18,871 annually (U.S. Census, 2017). Furthermore, of the various government programs aimed at benefiting students, it is the free or reduced lunch program offered to all eligible students in public schools which is the factor for determining the poverty level in the school being observed.

According to Jensen (2009), poverty is defined as "persons with income less than that deemed sufficient to purchase basic needs – food, shelter, clothing, and other essentials – are designated as poor" (p. 5-6). Because this dissertation is focused on a high-poverty school located in a rural area, it is important to know what rural poverty entails. Jensen stated that "rural poverty occurs in nonmetropolitan areas with populations below 50,000," and this is significant because "in rural areas, there are more single-guardian households, and families often have less access to services, support for disabilities, and quality education opportunities" (p.6).

Fram, et al. (2007) found that children coming from single-parent homes and children of mothers that became pregnant as teenagers typically attend high-minority schools at disproportionately higher rates. Furthermore, these single parents were reported to have lower levels of education along with lower socioeconomic statuses. Surprisingly, they also report that in the southern states, these characteristics are not only limited to minorities but also include a rather sizable rural white population. Unfortunately these characteristics are present in the rural area in which this case study was conducted and are typically indicative of low student achievement except in many high-poverty, high-minority, high-achieving (HPMA) schools.

In reference to the students, the effects of poverty are not always evident. One might think that students that live in poverty are always dirty with filthy clothes that have been handed down from older siblings. The effects of poverty are substantially more significant and may not be as obvious as one's appearance. Poverty affects "students' health and well-being; literacy and language development; access to physical and material resources; levels of mobility; and degree of continuity between home and school in terms of expectations, values, and beliefs" (Parrett & Budge, 2012, p. 117). Moreover, the authors noted that students living in poverty have to contend with the lack of human, social, and cultural capital. Human capital includes one's skills, abilities, and knowledge; social capital is the formation of relationships, both formal and informal, across social networks; and cultural capital refers to one's exposure to various literature, various travel destinations, and other activities that may require money to experience.

When poverty is mentioned in reference to schools, one might think about the "certain level of income relative to family size" (Parrett and Budge 2012, p.38). Yet, when discussing the subject of poverty in relation the students in school that live in poverty, Parrett and Budge recognized that it is important to almost exclusively look at poverty in the context of the schools.

In light of this observation, they define poverty in schools as "the percentage of students who are eligible for the free and reduced-price meal program" (p.39).

Clotfelter, Ladd, Vigdor and Wheeler (2006) utilized practices of earlier educational literature to determine how they would measure the level of poverty in their study. They also felt it necessary to measure the poverty level not by the school district or community but by the percentage of students that were eligible for free or reduced lunch at any particular school. To study these percentages at the elementary level have historically been easier to obtain than those of middle or high school students. As students advance further from elementary school, they are traditionally more ashamed to admit or report that their family lives in poverty. This results in many of the students not applying for and turning in their applications for free or reduced lunch as they progress through school.

The significance of students living and learning in a high poverty area is that the level and quality of life after graduation often results in negative outcomes. This is not to say that their entire life will be filled with failures. Yet, many that attain an education from these areas are more likely to have adverse health issues, to be limited in their career choices, and to be unable to earn sufficient income to live comfortably (Palardy, 2013).

The Makings of High-Minority, High-Poverty, High-Achieving Schools

The number of schools in poverty stricken, high-minority areas still persists despite the abundance of legislation from federal and local governmental agencies over the past half century. The students that attend schools located in these conditions continuously perform below the levels of those schools located in the more affluent school districts. Brown and Green (2014, p.2) site the legislative efforts of "the Civil Rights Movement of Act of 1964, The Effective Schools Movement of the 1970s and 80s, A nation At Risk Report, 1983; Standards and Accountability

Movement of the 1990s, and the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001" as efforts to increase the academic performance of those students that attend high-poverty, high-minority schools. Additionally and more specifically, Crampton, Wood, and Thompson (2015) cite "the Civil Rights Act of 1991, the 1994 passage of Goals 2000: Educate America Act, the School-to-Work Opportunities Act of 1994, the Safe Schools Act of 1994, and the Improving America's Schools Act" (p.51).

Essentially, these legislations are top down approaches to education. In other words, they were developed by policymakers, legislators, and bureaucrats that evaluated education from their positions instead of from the positions of educators that have direct contact with the students for which legislation was developed. Abernathy (2007) made this point by stating, "If policymakers evaluate schools from the top down, they end up increasing their influence and decreasing that of those closer to education production" (p. 95). To no avail, these efforts have not successfully increased the academic performance of students in such areas nationwide, but the phenomenon of 90-90-90 schools have managed to surface in spite of the status quo and will likely continue under ESSA.

Parrett and Budge (2012) state that high-poverty, high-minority schools are "places where students who live in poverty experience success, which leads to optimism, hope, and self-efficacy" (p. 2). The curriculum in these schools is not diluted, standards are raised, and instruction provides underachieving student with opportunities to excel equitably. These schools are more than often present with elementary and middle schools. Student achievement in elementary and middle schools has made progress in closing the achievement gap between low-income and more advantaged students. Yet, at the high school level, little success had been

achieved in this regard (Parrett & Budge, 2012). Though there is little success at the high school level, it is not indicative of the absolute absence of high schools achieving 90-90-90 statuses.

Some literature suggests several different characteristics are present in high-poverty, high-minority schools when academic levels increased. The research of Brown and Green (2014) reported leadership, collaboration, professional development, school organizations, data analysis, student interventions, and curriculum alignment as the characteristics present in their research. Kannapel, Clements, Taylor, and Hibpshman (2005) found the following seven common characteristics between eight high-performing, high-minority elementary schools throughout the state of Kentucky: high expectations, relationships, academic and instructional focus, student assessment, leadership and decision-making, faculty work ethic and morale, and finally teacher recruitment, hiring, and assignment. Kearney, Herrington & Aguilar (2012) researched one of fifteen 90-90-90 schools in South Central Texas in which they found that support structures, relationships inside and outside of the schools, and consistency in retaining administrators and teachers as the three primary themes that were present in the selected schools.

The eight dimensions of improvement identified by Parrett and Budge (2012, p. 22) were:

1. Ensuring effective district and school leadership
2. Engage parents, communities, and schools to work as partners
3. Understand and hold high expectations
4. Target low-performing students and schools
5. Align, monitor, and manage the curriculum
6. Create a culture a culture of data and assessment literacy
7. Build and sustain instructional capacity
8. Recognize time, space, and transitions

Although these and other characteristics can be found in high-minority, high-poverty, high-achieving schools, Kannapel et al. (2005) acknowledged the difficulty with incorporating or spreading these characteristics to not just different schools but to similar schools as well.

Most Common Internal School Characteristics

There are many characteristics identified by researchers that have been credited with turning around high-poverty, high-minority schools. Because of the differing characteristics and challenges that are significant to all schools, not all the identified characteristics credited with increasing academic achievement are present in all HPMA schools. As identified by student-participants in the study performed by Reddick et al. (2011), high-poverty, high-minority "schools were perceived by many to have lower standards than non- [high-minority, high-poverty] schools" (p. 602). This stereotype is why it is essential to find how and why some schools flourish in spite of obstacles and perceptions. I believe the most common characteristics present throughout the literature that may be applicable to the school being observed are leadership, consistency, teacher quality, school organization and support, collaboration and relationships, professional development, high expectations, academic performance, use of data in the schools, and educational funding.

Leadership.

When it comes to school leadership, it is commonly assumed that principals have the ability to put in place structures and processes to raise student achievement unless district personnel, policies, and procedures limit the principal's efforts to move forward. This is not just limited to flourishing schools, but it also applies to schools with a multitude of challenges as well. Parrett and Budge (2012) wrote that principals in challenging schools "serve as catalysts for the specific actions that in turn drive the success of the schools." The best school leaders, are

those that are able to identify advocates for students, create structures that will support those advocacy efforts, personally advocate for increasing student achievement for all students, scoring writing assessments, spending time back in the classroom, monitoring student portfolios, performing interventions with students, recognizing student achievement, building relationships with the business community, and identifying student academic needs (Krovez & Arriaza, 2006; Reeves, 2005). Thus, a cycle and environment of support for students' academic success is established and sustained.

Baker and Cooper (2005) study results suggested that the undergraduate academic prowess of a school's administrator prior to entering the education profession as teachers had a strong correlation to recruiting and selecting teachers that also possess strong undergraduate academic prowess. It is especially evident in schools that have high levels of students living in poverty. Furthermore, the authors suggested that teachers and administrators that work together and have such levels of academic prowess know what is needed to succeed in college, what to do to prepare for the college experience, and how to select and get accepted to an appropriate college that will suit the interest of their students. Such leadership and teacher knowledge is especially needed in high-poverty, high-minority schools to increase the number of students that are college and career ready. Acquiring such personnel in a rural school district is challenging at best.

Apart from the undergraduate academic prowess of school leadership, the leadership or principals themselves were acknowledged as reasons for improved academic performance in the high-poverty, high-minority schools. Kannapel et al. (2005) and Parrett & Budge (2012) reported that many principals incorporated some level of shared and distributed leadership. Principals in these types of schools did not rule with iron fists or dictate directives. They did not have egos that alienated their teachers. Subsequently, they invited faculty, staff, parents, and community

leaders to be included in most of the decisions made. This, in turn, boosted teacher moral and student academic success. Surprisingly, Kannapel et al. (2005) found no differences or advantages when it came to the age, experience, or gender of the principals. Of the eight principals in their study, half were below forty years of age with four to five years of experience, the other half were above forty with more than fifteen years experience, four were male, and the other four were female. All were able to turn their schools into HPMA schools.

With all of this in mind, it is important to recognize that school leadership has the ability to get many things accomplished in their schools. Yet, it is also important to recognize that their power to lead is not absolute. School leadership must deal with limitations such as laws, policies, teacher needs, student needs, and a myriad of other competing demands (Abernathy, 2007).

Consistency.

In addition to these limitations, school leadership must also deal with maintaining a consistent faculty and staff. They even must deal with the abundance or lack of consistent leadership in reference to the position they hold as principal or as a school leader. Kearney et al. (2012) and Parrett and Budge (2012) believe that consistency in school leadership is essential to maintaining an effective school, and when there is a change in the school leadership, high-performing schools usually rely on the leadership throughout the school to facilitate a smooth transition. In schools that have frequent turnover of leadership, the building of trust and the ongoing focus on academic excellence is disrupted at every change in leadership.

In addition to consistency with school leadership, Kearney et al. (2012) noted that consistency in their study was also manifested through teacher retention and the pedagogy. A consistent pedagogy was facilitated through grade level lesson plans that ensured that student-learning experiences were as consistent as possible. Retaining the same teachers allowed for

parents to develop open relationships the teachers. Mathis & Trujillo (2016) note that when there are many changes in the school staff, it harms struggling schools more than it helps.

Teacher Quality.

The capacity of human resources is paramount to the success of any organization. Unlike most other organizations, human resources in education systems does not just affect the personnel hired but also the students that are in daily contact with those personnel. To that end, teachers are specifically subject to scrutiny in terms of their knowledge for the subjects they teach as well as the manner in which they deliver their knowledge to their students. In order to be most effective in educating students, "recruiting capable teachers is critical to creating the breadth and depth of expertise needed within a faculty to undertake significant school development. Equally significant is the capacity to reshape a faculty over time by removing chronically low-performing teachers" (Bryk et al., 2010, p. 54-55).

Baker & Cooper (2005) report that many school districts are quite internalized. In other words, many of the administrators prefer to hire teachers that are local instead of hiring teaching candidates that may be the best fit for the job at hand. It was concluded in their study that that these hiring practices are part of the reason for the reduction in student performance, and because of the daily contact teachers have with students, it is essential that high-poverty, high-minority schools obtain the best teachers possible. Fram et al. (2007) report that these teachers have different and less desirable ways of teaching students than those teaching strategies utilized by teachers in other schools that will, in turn, benefit student growth.

To address such issues, one of a principal's primary responsibilities to improve the quality of education at their school is to obtain and retain the best teachers possible. Furthermore, students that attend such schools should not only have exceptional teachers, they should have

teachers better than those serving students at the more academically inclined schools. Findings suggest that schools in high-poverty areas, in fact, have teachers with lower academic qualifications, fewer years of teaching experience at the same school, and lower teaching certification levels (Baker & Cooper, 2005; Clotfelter et al., 2006; Fram et al., 2007; Parrett & Budge, 2012).

Teacher characteristics identified by parents of HPMA schools as some of the most influential qualities for student academic growth included complementing good student work, being positive, providing ongoing communication pertaining to their child's achievement, respecting and not degrading parents when communicating, and being open to criticism from parents. Parents also valued teachers that made learning fun and pushed their children to do their best while still maintaining a structured, strict classroom environment. The students in the McDermott & Rothenberg (2000) study also identified characteristics of their favorite teachers, which included "they do not yell, they are funny, they are nice, [they] share their lives with children by inviting children to their homes, [they] talk personally to children, and [they] use a variety of learning activities" (p.11-12). The presence of these characteristics in teachers allows for academic growth when students feel they are supported and cared about. To sustain these types of initiatives in a positive manner, it is important that principals address any rampant teacher turnover, difficulty with recruiting teachers, and retention of teachers that are the most effective for student learning.

Teacher Turnover, Recruitment, and Retention.

Clotfelter et al. (2006) site teacher turnover as a reason for low academic success among high-poverty students. This is because these students are said to not be ready to learn and lack the support needed from home. Students that come from advantaged homes are not perceived in

such a manner. As a result, if given the opportunity, the availability of jobs, and the manageable traveling distance from their home, teachers prefer to work in schools with the advantaged or affluent students.

One may also think that teachers will leave underperforming schools for those that pay more. This inference may only be applicable in school districts that border other states because all school districts within each state have a standard teacher pay matrix. Teachers that live near state lines inevitably have the option to teach in whichever state having higher paying jobs especially when they have years of teaching experience. Despite where teachers live, those with more teaching experience often opt for teaching opportunities in either higher paying schools or schools that have students from more advantaged homes. This, in turn, leaves open teaching positions that will be filled by novice, less experienced, and previously dismissed teachers to obtain in the high-poverty, high minority schools (Clotfelter et al., 2006).

On the other hand, a study performed by Jackson (2009) found that despite elevated levels of teacher turnover and switching that occurred in response to the school district's policy change, many of the teachers observed actually preferred to teach in schools with higher levels of low-income minority students. Although this occurred in this particular case, the article later divulges that the quality of those teachers that transferred or remained at those low-income minority schools were actually lower than the quality of teachers that chose to leave. Furthermore, when there was an influx of African American students to a particular school, the quality of both white and African American teachers were overall lower than those that chose to leave. Fram et al. (2007) also reported that schools like these also have significantly fewer white teachers overall.

Furthermore, schools that possess exceptional rates of teacher turnover also possess higher rates of minorities and poverty (Guin, 2004). One of the positive outcomes of high teacher

turnover is that new principals can utilize the ongoing attrition as opportunities to replace perceived ineffective teachers. In high-poverty, high-minority schools, there were systematic methods used to recruit the best teachers possible. Some administrators would listen for key words during the interview process that expressed a candidate's level of care and belief in the students. Some required candidates to demonstrate a sample lesson during the interview. Other principals were reported to have collaborated with local collages and universities in acquiring student teachers. This practice gave the principals the opportunity to scout for the strongest candidates to apply for any jobs that might come available for the next school year (Kannapel et al., 2005).

Once the best teachers are recruited, the next challenge is to retain those excellent and effective teachers in the high-minority, high-poverty schools. The retention of these teachers depends not on the leadership but on the hiring and retention of other effective teachers in which they can collaborate. Along with stable and supportive leadership, the presence of excellent and effective staff builds a culture in which teachers will remain at a challenging school in spite of the challenges (Parrett & Budge, 2012).

School Organization and Support.

Some of the effects of high teacher turnover are the detriments to the school organization as a whole. Detriments to the school organization include "loss of organizational productivity, a decrease in quality of service and an increase in direct economic and other intangible costs" (Guin, 2004, p.2). To counter these detriments, Jensen (2013) suggests that an environment should be created in which teachers are openly engaged in the education process in their schools. In facilitating an environment of school-wide social support and engagement, school leaders are open to and invite "an ongoing flow of ideas, feedback, and support" (p. 152). Additionally, to

further support the efforts of school leaders to improve the school organization, teachers must be willing to divulge the happenings of their classroom practices and be willing to intensely and respectfully converse about common problems to find common solutions (Bryk et al., 2010).

The premise behind facilitating an environment of engagement with teachers is that the idea of engagement itself is contagious. When teachers are immersed in an environment in which their engagement in the education process is valued and is allowed to flourish, they are likely to implement the same type of engagement in their respective classrooms. Teachers are open to sharing ideas not only with other teachers but also with their students. This social system creates an environment of strong collaboration and increased competence throughout the school in which trust, ongoing collaboration, and ongoing cooperation flourish (Jensen, 2013).

The findings of Kearney and Herrington (2010), Kearney et al. (2012), and Picucci, Brownson, Kahlert and Sobel (2000) found that the supports structures of 90-90-90 schools were instrumental in facilitating the academic success of their students. The support structures acknowledged by the studies included the presence of strong school leadership, shared leadership with the teachers and staff, common planning times, block scheduling, the hiring practices of new faculty, and professional development. Starting with the strong school leadership, principals need not be strong in the sense that they lead with absolute power. They must be able to inspire those they work with, be willing to celebrate the successes of students and teachers, and also be able to share the responsibility of making decisions to move the school organization forward. Shared leadership with the teachers gave them a sense of empowerment. As a result, teachers in the study felt that their principal supported and advocated for them. When hiring new teachers, the principals hired teachers that had a passion for children and not just those that knew their

subject matter. Once principals have the personnel in place that they trust will help students excel, meaningful professional development is facilitated at the school in which they educate.

One school organization and support structure example that was used was the implementation of systems for identifying academic deficiencies prior to giving diagnostic testing and addressing those deficiencies through the use of interventions. At the crux of these systems is the idea that students should not be referred for special services until all intervention opportunities have been exhausted such as being placed in smaller classes, being pulled out of class for intense help, being placed in remediation, and forming support teams, composed of teachers, parents, and administrators. The only way any of these programs could be overridden is by a requested special services testing from the parent or guardian. Otherwise, the students must go through the systems implemented at the student's respective schools (Ragland et al., 2002).

Ragland et al. (2002) also identified sharing leadership as a characteristic present in the five schools studied. When implementing shared leadership, the principles in the schools went the extra mile to ensure teachers stay engaged in sharing school leadership. Administrators reported alleviating teachers of "non-instructional duties so teachers can focus more on teaching" (p.18). Furthermore, the administrators invited active participation from faculty and staff in planning and creating instructional strategies. To make sure instructional strategies were purposeful and effective, the administrators also reallocated funds to support the lofty endeavors of their teaches. These activities not only kept teachers engaged in sharing school leadership, but it also served as an effective means of facilitating collaboration and teamwork.

Collaboration and Relationships.

At the heart of collaboration and relationships is the concept of trust. In schools with high teacher turnover, teachers report that the changing of colleagues every year prevents them from

building a sense of order and trust throughout the school. Such constant changes cause teachers annual frustration because they have to aid novice teachers with classroom discipline and helping them get used to the new school environment (Guin, 2004). Having a stable and consistent group of teachers helps cement the relationships and improve reliability for instructional guidance between both novice and veteran teachers.

In looking at high-poverty, high-minority, high-achieving schools, Kearney et al. (2012 p. 243-244) reported the presence of "relationships with caring and supportive adults within the school and community are established through mutual trust among all parties – school personnel, students, and parents." These relationships help with forming a web of partnerships using communication, and from the partnerships, schools are able to garner support for the needs of the school in the form of fund raising and volunteering. Other forms of partnerships that were found to be beneficial to increasing student success were those created with colleges and universities within close proximity, former students of the school, and the parents of the students attending their schools.

Kannapel et al. (2005) reported that the teachers in their research created and maintained exemplary relationships throughout the school organization. They also found that faculty work ethic and moral played into creating these strong relationships. In meeting "the needs of their sometimes-challenging students," they also managed to analyze data on a per-student basis, work after school, and work weekends (p. 15). These same teachers that demonstrated so much passion did not report any complaints about the workload or even teacher burnout.

Picucci et al. (2000) found that many of the high-performing middle schools they observed possessed collaborative environments as well. This was accomplished through "Creating a democratic environment in schools where staff input was valued and staff had considerable

decision making responsibility in their area of expertise, as well as control over their professional growth" (p.8). Many of these schools also managed to garner unprecedented support and independence from the school districts. The schools were given the autonomy to decide the best ways to address the curriculum and human resources as opposed to what the school districts might have mandated.

In the research conducted by Ragland et al. (2002) each of the schools involved in the study possessed various ways for encouraging and facilitating collaboration between the faculty and staff. Such efforts included using a curriculum program in which all of the teachers agreed upon, carefully aligning the school curriculum across grade levels, instituting grade-level planning, and teachers collaborating with administrators, counselors, and support specialist. Teachers reported that collaboration facilitated a greater understanding of new ideas, an opportunity to compare notes on how to improve each child's academic progress, and an opportunity to understand or implement other instructional strategies as well.

Collaboration in HPMA schools has also come in the form of interdisciplinary educational teams. Interdisciplinary teams consist of teachers that teach various subjects. For example, teachers that teach math, English, science, social studies, and various electives may all be grouped together as opposed to forming groups that are subject specific. Mertens and Flowers (2003) observed interdisciplinary teams in which teachers worked together to accomplish common goals and coordinate instructional strategies that were used throughout the school. This was made achievable through the use of common planning times and developing common practices.

Positive collaboration and relationships are not limited to the faculty and staff, but it also should go beyond the walls of the schools in which they work to include parents, families, and

other community stakeholders (Kannapel et al., 2005; McDermott & Rothenberg, 2000; Picucci et al., 2000). Communication with other stakeholders, especially the parents of the students being served, should be maintained throughout the school year. To this effect, McDermott and Rothenberg (2000) reported that parents relished in communication with teachers through newsletters, notes, phone calls, and even teachers being involved in the community. On the other hand, the parents disliked condescending and culturally insensitive teachers. These made the parents feel unwelcome in their children's school. The best teachers at high-poverty, high-minority schools faced this challenge head-on because it is inevitable that many teachers have differing cultural experiences as their students. Teachers in these schools addressed cultural differences by integrating the various cultures of the students into the curriculum through the use of "music, food, literature, dance, and guest speakers" (p. 13). This was educational not only for the students, but also for the teachers as well.

In the effort to get parents to become more involved, teachers must learn strategies in which parents will feel more comfortable and respected when communicating with teachers. McDermott and Rothenberg (2000 p. 16) also mention that the teachers must be sensitive of "different ethnic and cultural backgrounds" when it comes to communicating with parents. Furthermore, the authors argue that college and university education programs need to do more in terms of preparing teachers to address the ethnic and cultural differences they may face when dealing with the families and parents of the children they serve.

Murley, Keedy, & Welsh (2008) wrote that "principals and teachers in high-achieving, high-poverty schools influence each other through informal 'prerequisites' that created a foundation for influence among the principal and teachers; the emerging of assertive, instructionally knowledgeable teachers; and influence that must be perceived as highly valuable

for improving student outcomes either by principal or teacher" (p. 389). Other findings of the study suggest that the implementation of an exchange process between principals and teachers were attributed to increased student outcomes and the instructional capacity. Therefore, the relationships built between teachers and their principals has the ability open lines of communication, invite constructive criticism, and most importantly increase academic achievement as a result of the relationships. Opposite to the informal manners in which teacher-principal relationships occur, a more structured relationship commonly occurs through professional development.

Professional Development.

One of the primary methods to increasing student outcomes and the instructional capacity across all school systems is the implementation and proliferation of professional development for teachers. Professional development for educators is an ongoing requirement that must be documented for subsequent recertification of teacher licenses. Although professional development is supposed to ensure teachers are implementing the most up to date strategies, strengthening pedagogy, and facilitate personal growth, the presence of these requirements does not mean that the they are of great quality. Quality professional development not only keeps teacher up to date with newest trends in education, it should also build on prior teaching beliefs. Furthermore, quality professional development should be followed up to solidify understanding, and it should also provoke reflection on one's teaching practices (Bryk et al., 2010).

High teacher turnover can inadvertently cause ineffective professional development because of the school administration's need to repeat professional development sessions for new teachers. This causes veteran teachers to holistically view professional development as a waste of time (Guin, 2004). On the other hand, Kannapel et al. (2005) found that when the school

leadership team was responsible for facilitating in-house professional development, the team acted as a liaisons and filters for the school leadership. As a part of the process, the team would meet with the administration to decide what issues were most important to take to the other faculty in the form of professional development. The leadership team would then disseminate the agreed upon information in smaller professional development sessions.

High Expectations.

One topic that is prevalent in many professional development opportunities is the implementation and preservation of a system of high expectations. Per the Glossary of Education Reform (2013), a system of high expectations is the presence of an elevated level of standards for which all students are held accountable in the classroom, school, or school system. The idea of possessing a system of high expectations is important because a system of high expectations exists in the high school observed for this dissertation. This subject is presented to increase the understanding of how a HPMA school can maintain a system of high expectations.

In the research performed by Reddick et al. (2011), "[High-minority, high poverty] graduates often felt teachers had low expectations of students, and in turn, students had low expectations of the teachers, administrators, and themselves" (p.604). This quote from a participant in their study outlines the importance of the presence of high expectations in school. The absence or presence of high expectations permeates through all the individuals involved in the education process. Although this was the view of many students involved in the study, they still reported a presence of teachers and counselors that expected the best of them. Hence the reason for them matriculating to college.

Kannapel et al. (2005) reported that teachers in high-performing, high-poverty schools were reported to maintain the belief that all students can learn. In addition to this same belief

being present in the study performed by Brown and Green (2014), the teachers they studied meticulously reviewed each students' progress, set high expectations for their students, set high expectations for themselves, and spent a significant amount of time interpreting each student's test results. Being so concerned and thorough with the information builds on the usage of data driven instruction. By consistently implementing these behaviors, they will become common behaviors that will feed into the "expectations for what is normal" (Jensen, 2013 p. 37).

Kannapel et al. (2005 p.15) further reported that various levels of high expectations were present in the high-performing, high-poverty schools they studied. The idea of high expectations started with each principal having high expectations for each of their faculty and staff. In turn, the faculty and staff possessed high expectations for themselves and their students (Kannapel et al., 2005; Jensen, 2013; Ragland et al., 2002).

In the research of Ragland et al. (2002), the presence of high expectations was identified as one of the most significant and overwhelmingly effective characteristic present in their study. In the five schools observed, the administrators and teachers limited the use of labels that are typically placed on students when setting expectations. This was done to hold all students accountable in a consistent manner regardless of their intelligence. In the schools included in the study, many teachers evaluated the effectiveness of their system of high expectations through the results of student standardized test. In the event that test results were unfavorable, the teachers concluded that their level of expectation for themselves and their students was not sufficient and changes in expectations resulted. A very similar experience was present in the research of Picucci et al. (2000). They found that cultures of high expectations in the middle schools observed were created by facilitating relationships between teachers and students. These schools

also found ways to instill a sense of pride in both the students and teachers to improve student academics outcomes.

In schools that lack a culture of high expectations, the "atmosphere of low expectations permeates everything in a low performing school" (Parrett & Budge, 2012 p.73). In some instances, a system of low expectations is unfortunately intended to help students in terms of how they feel about learning and excelling academically. On the other hand, possessing systems of low expectations can be tools of prejudice, biases, classism, and racism. Principals can fight or change a culture of low expectations by modeling high expectations, by not accepting excuses for low achievement, and ensuring students feel they can learn in a safe climate (Parrett & Budge, 2012).

Jensen (2013) provides four strategies to help teachers cement a climate of high expectations in the classroom. First, is to "refer to the learning destination as a certainty" by assuming the students will complete and be successful when completing assignments. It is suggested that the teacher must be optimistic when giving instruction by stating, "When you finish the assignment..." instead of "If you finish the assignment..."

The second strategy states, "Do not have low-performing students set long-term achievement goals for themselves." The teacher should dictate this task, while the low-performing students themselves should be encouraged to identify short-term goals. Third, teachers should set "superb" as the long-term goal. In other words, teachers should set the long-term goals for their students extremely high. Then teachers must help students understand that they can reach those goals and also instill strong belief systems within each student. Lastly, teachers need to "affirm every little success early on" by acknowledging good grades on

assignments and assessments (p. 38). This too will help students build stronger beliefs in their own abilities to improve their academic performance.

Academic Performance.

Students' levels of self-motivation inevitably feed into their overall academic performance. Schools in high-poverty or low socioeconomic areas with a high number of minority students possessed students with lower grade-point-averages as well as lower achievement test scores in math and reading compared to students that attended schools in more affluent areas (Fram, Miller-Cribbs, & Van Horn, 2007; Palardy, 2013). Fram et al. also found that teachers in the low socioeconomic schools had lower salaries, and the schools were more likely to be located in a rural setting with fewer than 600 students enrolled. These schools were almost three times more likely to have Black and/or Hispanic student populations along with low teacher morale, which is attributed to "negative educational, social, and economic consequences for underrepresented minority students." Consequently, both the ability of teachers to effectively engage students as well as the students' ability to engage in the learning process are greatly hindered.

Furthermore, the continuation of declining academic gains and the rise in "frustration, embarrassment, and failure" sometimes leads to drop out (Parret & Budge, 2012). This is especially evident in high-minority, high-poverty schools in the South that generally have higher numbers of African American children than any other minority group (Fram et al., 2007). It is in these schools that the mission of the United States, in regards to education, is the expectation of high-achievement (Parrett & Budge, 2012). The authors also report that "in many schools, particularly those where a large percentage of the students live in poverty, low achievement continues to be the norm" (p. 12). Perry et al. (2003) also wrote:

> The dilemma of achievement for African Americans is tied to (a) their identity as members of a castelike minority group; (b) the larger society's ideology of Black intellectual inferiority and its reproduction in the mass media and in everyday interactions; (c)their identity as members of a group whose culture is seen, by all segments of the society, even other people of color, as simultaneously inferior and attractive; and (d) their identity as American citizens (p. 79).

The teachers and administrators studied by Ragland et al. (2002) acknowledged not only these and other barriers affecting their students' academic performances, but more importantly they addressed the best way to overcome those barriers. Acknowledging the barriers gave the administrators and teachers a base on which interventions could be implemented. Interventions were facilitated by creatively using available resources to address the issues students were faced with. The schools used interventions such as tutoring, classroom instruction, counseling, small rewards, positive reinforcements, teacher-student pairing, professional development, and paying attention to changes in student academic performance. Abernathy (2007) noted that peer motivation was an important factor for student achievement stating that "Peers matter. Being around motivated, smart, and well-educated students makes a child learn more, regardless of what the school is doing" (p. 30).

Yet, I feel all of this could be for naught if students continuously fail to engage in the learning process and do not take control of their own learning experiences. In many cases, engagement factors are perceived as daunting especially when school personnel are not aware of how the factors affect the students they serve. More importantly, negative engagement factors can be overcome if school personnel are aware of those factors so that they can collectively

formulate school-wide plans and programs that will help their students to academically excel in spite of the antagonism.

Engagement Factors Affecting Academic Performance.

As schools go through the process of formulating a school-wide plan, it would be detrimental if they do not acknowledge engagement factors that affect student learning and each teacher's pedagogy. Although this is an issue that is tackled inside the physical school walls, the root of the issue may lie outside of those school walls. Jensen (2013) wrote that student engagement in the education process is an effect of poverty. Furthermore, the effects of students living in poverty are not just limited to the lack of money to participate in school activities, the lack of parental involvement, or the acquisition of free or reduced lunch at school. He recognizes seven factors that effect student engagement: health and nutrition, vocabulary, effort and energy, mind-set, cognitive capacity, relationships, and stress levels. These engagement factors are recognized for the difficulty teachers have educating and graduating impoverished students.

Health and nutrition encompasses the physical, mental, and emotional aspects of student health. Students that live in poverty often live in poorly maintained homes, have limited to no access to proper physical or mental healthcare, cannot afford quality foods, and are less likely to exercise. Inadequate healthcare can affect a child's ability to be properly diagnosed for any physical or mental conditions that may be a detriment to the education process, such as poor eyesight, dyslexia, depression and the like. Inadequate nutrition adversely affects brain function and the ability to focus (Jensen, 2013). Students are unable to focus on learning when they are hungry or are not sure if they will eat when they get home. The lack of nutrition is attributed to undesired student behavior as well.

The vocabulary of students that live in poverty is subpar compared to students from middle and upper income homes. This vocabulary deficiency is even evident among toddlers. When high-poverty children reach school age, they are more likely to struggle due to the lack of their vocabulary range, and as a result, they are likely to disengage from the education process (Jensen, 2013). Although this is an internal school issue, student disengagement can also derive from the lack of effort and energy to learn because of the perceived lack of effort and energy from teachers. The author reports that teachers who build connections and relationships with students are able to get high poverty children to increase their efforts to learn. Teachers must acknowledge the cultural similarities and differences between themselves and their students. This provides students with ideas of who their teachers really are and allows them to make connections with the teachers. When this occurs, students tend to be more engaged in the class and will work harder for those teachers that make the effort to facilitate such connections (Jensen, 2013).

Additionally, Bryk, Sebring, Allensworth, Luppescu, and Easton (2010) wrote about how "supplemental academic and social supports" affect learning and student engagement (p. 49). They go on to state how students that attend disadvantaged schools and have a myriad of issues inside and outside of school have significant difficulties engaging in learning. Furthermore, when "a classroom suffers from chronic absenteeism and tardiness, effective learning time may diminish," which results in teachers taking time to go back over information that those students missed (p.50). It is up to teachers and administrators to figure out how the various issues affects their students and how best to motivate student engagement.

On the other hand, the mind-set of the students that are least engaged and are living in poverty is often pessimistic. A student's negative mind-set in school often carries over to a

negative mind-set about their future educational and job prospects. Alternately, students that maintain a positive outlook and attitude about their education often perform better academically. To change the negative mind-sets of students requires teachers that believe their students are able to learn at high levels and maintain high expectations for student success. Such teacher actions are credited with changing students' negative mind-sets about their futures, positively changing their belief in themselves, and obtaining more confidence in their own mental and cognitive capacity (Abernathy, 2007; Jensen, 2013).

A student's cognitive capacity is greatly influenced by the side effects of growing up in a high poverty environment. Living in older, dilapidated homes with outdated lead pipes exposes children to the many negative side effects of ingesting the poisonous metal, such as trouble with memory and short attention spans. Fortunately, positive changes in living conditions along with highly motivated teachers can counter the suppression of a child's cognitive capacity. And because one's IQ is not fixed, there is always time for strong teachers to increase poor students' academic progress and overall success (Jensen, 2013).

Like some of the other engagement factors, relationships inside and outside of school are important to student engagement (McDermott, 2000). It is important to note that not all relationships are beneficial to student engagement. Positive relationships based on healthy interactions with adults and teachers benefit children the most. When there are negative interactions between children and adults, engagement in education is low, and consequently the children are largely unable to regulate their own emotions. The inability of children to regulate their own emotions in relation to negative relationships and interactions with adults often results in a child's difficulty with maintaining appropriate behaviors and reacting to situations with appropriate behavioral responses at school. Here again, strong student-teacher relationships can

aid in countering the ill effects of other negative relationships (Jensen, 2013; Kearney & Herrington, 2010).

The stress levels of students also affect their engagement in school. Students that live in poverty are more likely to be stressed by living conditions and family dynamics. Acute stress, or intense short-term stress, along with chronic stress, which is the presence of ongoing stressful situations, both negatively effect student engagement at school. In addition to not being engaged in the learning process, stress also affects children physically, emotionally, and cognitively. Because many impoverished students experience elevated levels of stress compared to other students, they are more likely to present aggressive and passive attitudes toward opposition and challenges. Teaching coping skills and stress relief techniques often help to counter or lower student stress levels (Evans & Kim, 2013; Jensen, 2013). Another way to help students cope with stress when it comes to learning, was to gather data from various tests to inform teacher instruction.

Use of Data.

Determining the level at which students are able to succeed is manifested from the data collected through the use of both standardized and unstandardized assessments. In reference to standardized tests, Jensen (2013) wrote, "Standardized intelligence tests show a correlation between poverty and lower cognitive achievement, and low-SES [socioeconomic status] kids often earn below-average scores in reading, math, and science and demonstrate poor writing skills" (p.38). In response to the achievement gap and the struggles of those students living in poverty, various local and federal legislation in recent years have pushed for the use of data in education. Many of the studies on HPMA schools identify the use of data as a drive for

instruction in the classroom and for making decisions that best benefit student learning. Such is the case for the school being observed.

Jensen (2009) also wrote that high-performing schools commonly disregarded the results from state and district tests as the only measurements of academic achievement, and they generated "their own high-quality, useful data on an ongoing basis [to] provide immediate feedback to both students and teachers" (p.73). "Failure to collect the meaningful data necessary to analyze individual student proficiency and diagnose deficiencies prohibits educators from prescribing and providing effective interventions" (Parrett and Budge, 2012 p.105). Collecting, understanding, and utilizing data for educational purposes is known as data driven instruction.

Today's teachers must have the knowledge and must be abreast on the latest data pertaining to their students. But, for data to be effective for teachers, it must be easily digestible for its identified purpose. Creating an easily digestible data system will ensure teachers understand the data and are able to apply changes to their instruction that reflect the needs addressed in data. Furthermore, having an effective data system will also aide in effectively guiding organizational decisions pertaining to the use of funding, personnel, and time inside and outside of the school (Parrett and Budge, 2012).

In the research performed by Kannapel et al. (2005), there was evidence of teachers in all of the schools observed participating in data driven instruction. They would utilize the state's core content standards as a means to map out the curriculum and instructional strategies. After students were assessed using the states summative core content assessment, the results were used to modify curriculum and instructional strategies. In addition to the summative assessment, each school had several formative assessments that were given throughout the school year in which to assess student academic progress. It was also reported that the schools adopted various programs

to address the changes and deficiencies in student academic performance. There was no dominating program that all the schools utilized; rather, each school decided on the programs they felt would be best for their students' academic success. In addition to the programs, various strategies were used in the various schools studied such as reducing class sizes during literacy activities, matriculating students with the same teacher over a period of years, and rewards assemblies.

Similar interventions were used in the five schools studied by Ragland et al. (2002, p. 20) in which the schools used ongoing assessment data to "identify barriers to learning as early as possible so they [could] develop intervention strategies." The idea behind implementing early interventions is to make sure that students are equipped to perform on grade level. Effective changes could not be made to the instructional strategies unless assessment data were disaggregated and analyzed appropriately to discern the best interventions to implement.

Educational Funding.

Many of the interventions needed to improve student achievement need some level of funding. The school being observed for this study attempts to implement interventions knowing educational funding is limited throughout the school district. Educational funding is not only important for the implementation of interventions; it is also important for funding salaries and acquiring the best learning material tailored to their students' needs.

The question of equitable funding between schools that service an abundance of impoverished students and schools that do not is an issue that has been brought to bear. Inequitable funding goes beyond the per-pupil cost of education. Inequitable funding in high-poverty schools affects the acquisition and use of resources to be used in advancing learning opportunities of impoverished students. Typically, due to the overwhelming lack of funding and

resources, high poverty schools often have more novice teachers and teachers that do not teach from their area of expertise (Parrett & Budge 2012).

With overreaching legislation and very limited funding deriving from the federal government, state and local governments are left to finance educating their students. Financing education at this level requires formulas to distribute funds to the many services afforded to the citizens. Yet, because the funding derives from taxes and because some cities lack an adequate tax base, the states themselves are assuming "some level of responsibility for funding schools, albeit reluctantly in some cases" (Crampton et al. 2015, p. 51).

Despite the state's reluctance, Crampton et al. (2015) found that on average one third of state budgets fund the education of students from kindergarten through high school. Furthermore, the taxes collected that shape state budgets come from both individual and corporate income taxes as well as some sales taxes. The collection of local sales taxes derives primarily from property taxes but also include both sales and income taxes much like those at the state level. With funding coming from multiple sources and with substantial portions of the funding coming from the state level, the struggle for power between the state and local governments to delegate the use educational funds has been the result. This still occurs even though federal laws and statutes supersede those deriving from the state and local levels.

It is the believed by some that the abundance or lack funding resources from the federal, state, and local levels do not make a difference in student academic outcomes. On the other hand, the author Johnathan Kozal (2005) observed that the inequitable funding in New York state was the result of politicians pointing to the ever-shifting economy, while many of the schools located in suburban and affluent areas still flourished with higher per-pupil spending. He also noted a sizable discrepancy in teacher pay between the affluent and poor school districts suggesting

better teachers could be recruited to suburban school districts with the enticement of higher wages and better benefits. Abernathy (2007) also believed differently by stating:

> Money does matter, but not uniformly and without careful thought into where it goes and on what basis it is handed out. Resources applied or withheld without an adequate understanding of agency, incentives, leadership, and context will probably not produce the desired educational benefits. The challenge involved in translating these resources into positive outcomes should not lead policymakers to give up on their possibility (p.133).

Title I.

The creation of the Title I program is a model example of policymakers not giving up on the possibility of positive outcomes with federal resources. The United States legislature declared that "the purpose of this title [Title I] is to provide all children significant opportunity to receive a fair, equitable, and high-quality education, and to close education achievement gaps" (Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965, as amended by ESSA, 2016). Title I eligibility for schools is based on the academic performance as well as the overall income status of the student body much like the guidelines used to determine free or reduced lunch eligibility (Parrett & Budge, 2012). Crampton et al. (2015) provided a more thorough outline of how Title I functions by stating:

> Children qualified if they met certain criteria, such as the $2,000 family income limit. Entire schools could qualify for Title I status if they met threshold numbers of qualifying children in a single school. Schools qualified on three criteria: number of low-income families; number of children receiving Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC); and a formula taking into account the statewide expenditure per pupil. (p. 50).

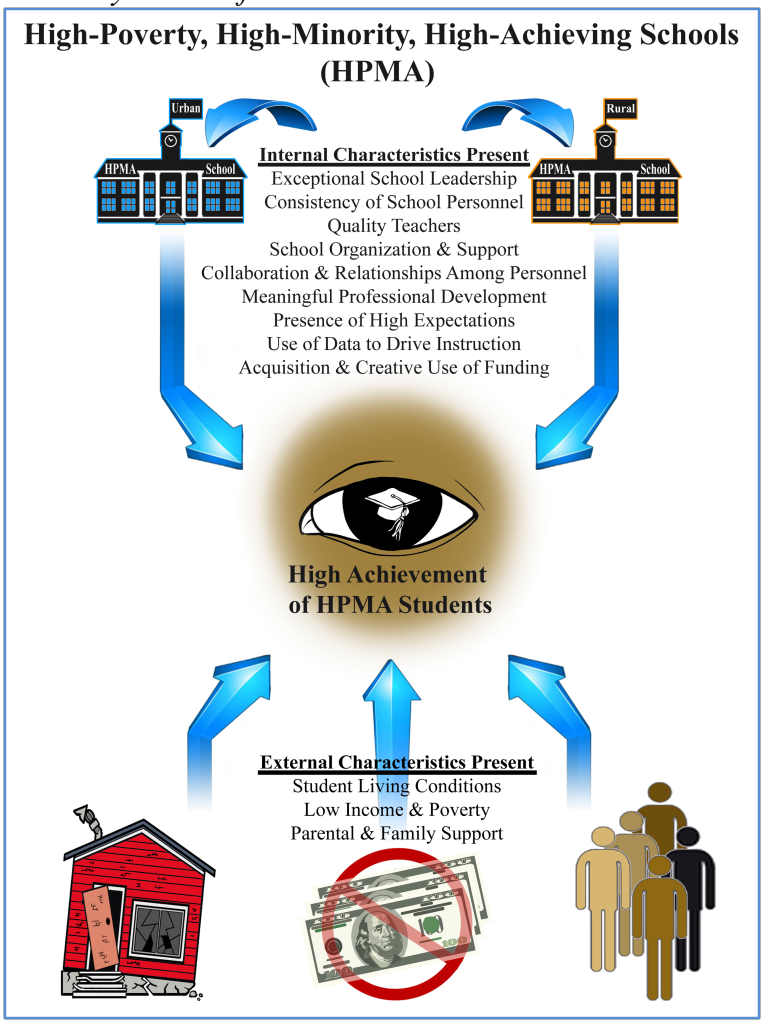
Unfortunately, under NCLB, the previous iteration of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965, states were required to "sanction poorly performing schools and districts in a variety of ways, the withholding of Title I funds [was] the only direct consequence that the federal government [could] apply to education at the state and local level" (Abernathy, 2007 p. 4-5). Taking or mandating the reallocation of Title I funds from high poverty schools is obviously not the best way to help a school failing to make annual yearly progress (AYP) in order to adhere to the requirements of NCLB. Essentially, the federal government took funds from schools and school systems that lacked a sufficient tax base to sufficiently fund themselves and lacked the financial means to implement programs to improve student performance on the standardized tests used to determine AYP. This notion goes against the initial sole purpose of Title I. Roza (2005) wrote the government created Title I to specifically inject federal funding into poor schools in order to level educational opportunities with more affluent schools.

Under the current iteration of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965, otherwise known as the ESSA, the implementation of Title I has changed. Since the law was reissued in 2015, Title one funds were no longer taken from schools that failed to make AYP. Instead, ESSA requires that "funds under part A [of Title I] be used to supplement, and not supplant, State and local funds" ("Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965, as amended by ESSA," 2016). In other words, schools that were designated as Title I schools would no longer lose funds if AYP is not achieved, instead they would still receive local, state, and federal funds to improve academic achievement ("Fact Sheet: Supplement-not Supplant under Title I," 2016).

Yet, the implementation of Title I and its effects on the academic success of students has been difficult to assess in through research. For instance, Van der Klaauw (2008) reported that

the implementation of Title I in New York City schools bared little to no effect on student academic success. But, the author also found that Title I funding only accounted for about five percent of the various schools' budgets which is insignificant when compared to the ninety-five percent of school budgets that derive from other sources. Furthermore, Borman and D'Agostino (2008) assessed the effectiveness of Title I through the utilization of programs that were funded in the schools studied. With similar results, they found no definitive correlation between the effectiveness of Title I on student academic achievement but reported that their "results suggest a positive trend for the educational effectiveness of Title I across the years of its operation" (p.324).

Table 3: Literary Summary Model of HPMA Schools



Assessing and Determining High Achievement

Most literature pertaining to HPMA schools are focused on both elementary and middles throughout the nation. As illustrated on *Table 1*, there were only three studies that solely focused on high schools. The first study by Jarrett, Wasonga, & Murphy (2010) focused on teacher perceptions of shared leadership and its academic impact. The second by Palardy (2013) used students' academic transcripts, graduation data, and post-graduation data to determine the relationship between socioeconomic segregation in high schools and student ability to enroll in college. The third by Reddick et al. (2011) used the perceptions of college students that graduated from high-poverty high-minority schools to gage students managed to enroll in college.

None of these studies solely used graduation percentages as a means of assessing student achievement, and none focused on the perspectives of the students in reference to high academic achievement and graduation percentages. More importantly, none used graduation exams results, the ACT assessment, or any other standardized or high-stakes assessments to determine high achievement. This idea that other studies opted not to use these types of assessments as measurements of success does not seem coincidental. In 2013, the Alabama State Board of Education voted to systematically take steps to get rid of its high-stakes testing graduation exam (Sentence, 2017). This assessment and other standardized tests such as the ACT have been studied by others. The studies by Hong and Young (2008), Heilig and Darling-Hammond (2008), and Madaus and Clarke (2001) found that they fail to motivate the unmotivated; are not equitable among genders, various races, and cultures; are detrimental to teaching practices and learning; decrease educational opportunities among minorities; and increase minority high school drop outs. Therefore, high-stakes tests are not viable measurement tools of academic success.

The emphasis on high-stakes testing began with the Nation at Risk Report from the National Commission on Excellence in Education (1983) to the United States Department of Education, the Alabama Legislature has consistently found and mandated ways to implement high-stakes tests as measurements of student academic success. By using declining student scores on the ACT and SAT assessments, the report suggested that the education systems throughout the United States were producing a rising number of mediocre students compared to other countries. Therefore, measures were taken to ensure our continued dominance in the world when it involves educating the youth such as the implementation of more high-stakes testing. Unfortunately, those measures produced negative consequences and outcomes. With this history and outcomes in mind, this case study will not utilize high-stakes testing results. Unlike any other study, it will use high school graduation percentages.

CHAPTER THREE: METHODS

Introduction

This chapter will expound on the research methods used in this study in which a single high school in the rural Alabama Black Belt was examined to identify HPMA school status. The areas of interest in this chapter include the purpose, methodology utilized, role of participant and site selection, data processes, maintaining reliability and validity, assumptions, and limitations of the study.

Purpose

Since slaves were brought over to the Americas on slave ships, the United States' social, economic, and financial structure was based on the superiority of one group of people over another (Tate, 1997). The group of people that were overall responsible for the oppression of other people is known as whites. The other group of people that were, and in many cases still are, oppressed is known as minorities. The minority group has a couple of subcategories: African Americans, Hispanics, Asians, American Indians, and bi- or multi-racial. Yet, the minority group that is the focus of oppressive tactics throughout the history of the United States is the African Americans (Ladson-Billings, 1998). As expressed by the fifth tenant of CRT, counter-narratives of minority viewpoints are vital, and the African American minority participants of this study will aid in this counter-narrative.

As only three-fifths of a person, African Americans began as slaves and were labeled as property, meaning they were just something, not someone, owned by another person. After the eradication of slavery, segregation was the tool used by the government and citizens alike to minimize the personhood of African Americans. During this time, schools with white students were provided with the best material, curriculum, and finances to succeed. African Americans

had run-down schools, little material, white-washed curricula, and little money to ensure the academic, social, and financial success of African American students (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012; Ladson-Billings, 1998).

Segregation of all public and private facilities, including schools, was eradicated with the 1956 Supreme Court *Brown v. Board of Education* decision (Richardson & Luker, 2014). Yet, segregation and white dominance only ended in the eyes of the law and not in the eyes of men, especially the eyes of white men according to Delgado and Stafancic (2012). Although African Americans are no longer considered as three-fifths of a person and are no longer segregated from whites, many of the segregation tools are still used in government, society, and school systems alike. Many whites willfully disregard that race matters in today's society and believe that all races are treated the same. Yet, governmental and educational decisions are made to moderately address the needs of African Americans while adequately addressing the needs of whites.

In education systems, this dynamic is evident in affluent areas that have better schools and student outcomes versus destitute areas that have old school buildings, sub-par curricula, and poor student outcomes. Poverty stricken areas in southern states, such as urban and rural areas, typically possess low property values that lead to poor education funding as well as exceptionally high numbers of minority residence (Jensen, 2009). Such adversity, including legislation that steers and keeps funding in affluent areas, does not academically, socially, and eventually financially benefit African Americans that live and learn in poverty.

Yet, there are schools in such areas that defy the odds of the academic disparities. These schools are High-poverty, High-minority, High-Achieving (HPMA) schools. In other research efforts, HPMA schools are identified by several names: 90-90-90 Schools, Blue Ribbon Schools of Excellence, Torchbearer Schools, and High-performing, High-poverty Schools. Aside from

being located in impoverished areas, these schools are identified by possessing a high number of students that receive free or reduced lunch, a high minority student enrolment, as well as exceptional academic gains and graduation rates. This case study similarly follows this model.

This study focused on the success of a HPMA high school for three reasons. First, the majority of other research efforts regarding HPMA schools are focused on both elementary and middle schools that meet particular criteria to be categorized as HPMA schools. Consequently, this means that there were relatively very few research efforts in regards to HPMA high schools in which this study will contribute to the body of work.

This leads to the second reason. There are many more high-poverty, high-minority high schools that struggle to acquire high student achievement. There needs to be as many possible high school success models as possible to serve as beacons or guides to student achievement in rural, poor, and academically disadvantaged areas. This case study will provide a model in which other academically failing high schools can observe, learn, and copy to suit their schools' needs.

Third, there is an unwritten, sociological, and ongoing belief that African American students, especially those in high poverty or rural areas, are incapable of academically performing as well as their white counterparts (Belfanz, 2009). Therefore, African American high school students are believed to be incapable of graduating and adequately competing with whites in college and in the workforce (Kearney & Herrington, 2010; Kearney, Herrington, & Aguilar, 2012). This study addresses why it is imperative to not overlook the academic prowess a majority poor and minority student population in high schools.

Considering these three reasons, the study of HPMA schools is difficult to research due to their scarcity, identification, and ongoing changes in students' academic performance measurments. These schools can only exist in specific areas with particular percentages of poor

and minority students respectively and possess a high percentage of academic successes among those students. Finding, studying, and documenting HPMA schools, such as the one in this case study, is paramount for increasing the academic performance of students in similar schools and more specifically to address the achievement gap between all white and minority students.

The aim of this study was to explore how one high school located in an impoverished area in Alabama managed to increase the academic success of its students and its graduation percentages. This research examined how former students, school leaders, and other constituents perceived this feat as well as barriers that challenged their progress. It also examined if characteristics present in other HPMA schools were present in the high school identified for this study.

The research question in this study was:

- How does a high-minority, high-poverty school in the Rural Black Belt of Alabama garner high student achievement?

Methodology

Determining what kind of knowledge needs to be gathered determines the type of research to be used. If the researcher is looking for the causes of a phenomena or occurrence, a quantitative study may be the best fit. If the researcher wants to find out the why or how of a phenomena or occurrence, then a qualitative study may be the best fit (Stake, 1995). The vast majority of the articles I read pertaining to HPMA schools, such as the most notable studies performed by Carter (2000); Clotfelter, Ladd, and Vigdor (2007); Hagelskamp and DiStasi (2012); Kannapel, Clements, Taylor, and Hibpshman (2005); Kearney and Herrington (2010); Levin (2011); and Reeves (2003); used the qualitative case study method when primarily examining elementary and middle schools. Additionally, of the eighteen research efforts I found

only three solely focused on HPMA high schools, six included high schools in K-12 collective research efforts, and none of which were focused in the Black Belt region of Alabama. It is for this reason, and that a case study design acknowledges the voices, perceptions, and actions of the people involved in the case, that I used the case study method as well to study a high school located in the rural Alabama Black Belt. Currently there are no known or published studies of HPMA high schools in this area or the state. Furthermore, this research not only added to the body of work on HPMA schools, it also brought light to the academic gains present in one of the most impoverished regions of the United States.

Case Study

Merriam (1988) defined case study research as "an examination of a specific phenomenon such as a program, an event, a person, a process, and institution, or a social group" (p.9). According to Yin (2009) "The case study is preferred in examining contemporary events…when the relevant behaviors cannot be manipulated" unlike an experiment in which behaviors are manipulated (p.11). Similarly, historical studies can be utilized because the behaviors that are studied cannot be manipulated as well. Yet, the difference between historical and case studies is that direct observations of events from the people involved can be gathered via an interview process.

To facilitate the examination of the school in this research, I used a case study research method utilizing interviews and other data, such as student demographic, graduation, drop out, and free or reduced lunch percentages. "As a research method, the case study is used in many situations, to contribute to our knowledge of individual, group, organizational, social, political, and related phenomena" (Yin, 2009, p. 4). For this dissertation, the necessity for the case study

arose “out of the desire to understand [a] complex social phenomena” which in this case is a HPMA high school (p. 4).

What makes “case studies in education is their focus on questions, issues, and concerns broadly related to teaching and learning. The setting, delivery system, curriculum, student body, and theoretical orientation may vary widely, but the general arena of education remains central to these studies” (Merriam, 1988, p. 27). Considering other identified HPMA schools throughout the literature, I honed in on several factors that contribute to teaching and learning including the setting or school location, the delivery of the pedagogy, the curriculum, and the makeup of the student body. The goal of this research is to examine such a school in the rural Alabama Black Belt as well as to determine how the phenomenon occurred and how it was sustained.

The Researcher

The researcher’s roles in the research process can be varied. Stake (1995) notes “the roles may include teacher, participant observer, interviewer, reader, storyteller, advocate, artist, counselor, evaluator, consultant, and others” (p. 91). Merriam (1988) noted that the researcher serves as the primary instrument in the process to garner and analyze all data gathered in the research process. This allows for the researcher to facilitate data collection efforts by assessing and responding to information that is more or less meaningful to the research effort. “Conversely, the investigator as human instrument is limited by being human – that is, mistakes are made, opportunities are missed, personal biases interfere” (p. 37). Of the various researcher roles, I took on the roles of being an interviewer and advocate. To garner the information needed to examine the school that was researched, becoming an interviewer was necessary. Being an advocate for children is a responsibility I willingly hold dear, and being an advocate for African American children is a responsibility I must hold dear. Because I too am African American and

because I too grew up in poverty, I believe it is my duty to fight for the equal educational rights, opportunities, teacher quality, physical resources, funding, and schools on behalf of the poor, disenfranchised, African American children I serve.

"Qualitative researches are noninterventionist. They try to see what would have happened had they not been there…. When they cannot see for themselves, they ask others who have seen. When formal records have been kept, they pour over the documents" (Stake, 1995, p. 44). To observe the characteristics of the school, I severed as a noninterventionist in that I did not partake in the process of academic success nor did I perform direct observations on the school campus. It was more feasible to interview those that were directly involved as well as analyzing documents for information. I then became and interventionist when I served as an interviewer for participants with ties to the school – an advocate and voice for those without one.

Site Selection and Participants

It was from both the interviews and documents that I could draw a perspective. In turn, my perspective was shaped by the selection of both the participants and the school site which were collected through purposeful sampling. Purposeful sampling is also called purposive, judgmental, or criterion-based sampling by other researchers (Berg & Lune, 2012; Merriam, 1988). In purposeful sampling the researcher selectively chooses people, groups of people, and other subjects, such as the school site, because of the researcher's in-depth knowledge of those subjects. Furthermore, Burg and Lune (2012) stated that some samples or subjects are selected "in order to ensure that certain types of individuals or persons displaying certain attributes are included in the study" (p. 52).

Site Selection/Case

Lynnewood High School, the pseudonym for this case study school, was located in the rural Black Belt region of Alabama. I selected the school for several reasons. First, the Black Belt region is identified as a region which has rich black soil for agriculture, and for its high concentration of African Americans that are the descendants of the slaves that worked the lands before them. These residents generally live at or below the poverty line, and the students that live and learn in this region are victims of circumstance over which they have no control. It is important to mention that the minority population at Lynnewood High School is solely African American and is void of any other minority groups such as Hispanic, Asians, and Arabs.

Second, the school was consolidated with another school many years ago that had a substantial white student population. The evacuation of white students, also known as white-flight, occurred leaving an almost exclusive African American school population. This was due to the perceived behaviors of African American students, the belief that academics would be adversely affected, and the presence of long-standing racial tension and separation in the community. This high school is particularly a good fit for this study because it provided a counter-narrative to the beliefs of the white students, their parents, the community, the local and state boards of education, and the state legislature.

When the white students departed, their parents enrolled them in the local private school and in another high school in the district that already possessed a significant white-student population. The private school was in the same city while the other high school the white students relocated to was over 20 miles away. It was perceived by the whites in the community that the other schools would provide better academic opportunities, and these thoughts would help to continue the separation of races academically and socially. The idea that white residents

believed that the school in question would not provide an adequate education makes the school an ideal case for why high poverty and minority schools should not be underestimated. Additionally, without white-flight, the school may not have reached the minority and free or reduced lunch criteria to become a HPMA school.

Lastly, I selected the school because of its rise in graduation percentages despite perceptions of the school. Other HPMA studies that observed high schools used graduation percentages, standardized test results, and college enrollment to determine academic achievement. The studies by Brown and Green (2014), Palady (2013), and Reddick et al. (2011) partly used graduation rates and percentages as a part of their academic achievement indicator to describe the severity of low academic achievement or the matriculation of students to college. Moreover, none explicitly used high school graduations percentages to determine the presence of high academic achievement. They used standardized test and graduation exam results as well. Because of the racial biases of standardized tests and that all high school students do not go to college even if they are smart enough to do so, I decided to use graduation percentages as the academic achievement indicator.

In 2013, the Alabama State Department of Education (ALSDE) discarded the use of high school graduation exams as a tool to determine each students' academic proficiencies to graduate which affected each high school's graduation numbers and percentages. The department of education moved to another assessment, the ACT, but decided to not use the students' results as a graduation requirement. Instead, the ACT and its subsidiary tests were used as a measuring tool to determine the bottom six percent of all schools to be place on the Alabama Failing Schools List. I argue that this was done to benefit white students who generally perform better on such assessments, that the use of this external measurement tool was an attempt to provide a

seemingly flat measurement among all students despite their race, gender, school, living conditions, poverty, and life experiences, and that it was easier to use as opposed to developing a more balanced comprehensive school academic assessment tool. Furthermore, standardized test have been shown to not gage students solely on their academic abilities but more so on the students' and parents' affluence (Popham, 2009). Per CRT, this was an example of implementing a decision that does not benefit minorities.

In full disclosure, it would be foolish to state that all student of high-poverty, high-minority schools are incapable of performing at high levels on the ACT, other standardized assessments, and in school. There are many students from those schools that managed to do so. In fact one of the recent graduate participants, who was the valedictorian, scored a 30 on the ACT. Yet, this does not excuse the ACT and other standardized assessments from being racially biased and being measurements of affluence.

As of 2018, Alabama high school students were only required to earn credits for English Language Arts, Mathematics, Science, Social Studies, Physical Education, Health Education, Career Preparedness, Career Technical Education, Foreign Language, and Arts Education to graduate (Alabama High School Graduation Requirements, 2018). With no state-wide assessment to determine students' preparedness for graduation and with only the state's implementation of credit requirements to determine student graduation, this further gave me rational to solely use the graduation percentages from the school's students as an indicator of high achievement.

Participant Selection

The criteria used for selecting participants for this study varied. I purposefully selected the two groups to participate that included recent graduates of the school and the school leadership

team. The recent graduate participants that participated included those that had graduated in the previous three years because all of which are not that far removed from the happenings of the school, they attended the school under the same school administration, and they are all over 19 years of age. The age requirement is significant because of the ease of acquiring consent to participate from adult subjects rather that under age subjects which require parental permission as mandated in the state of Alabama.

The variances in these subjects were the year they graduated, age, and gender. All of these particular participants were African American. I selected the recent graduate participants because they could intricately speak on academic advancements, social issues, community involvement, parental involvement, living and learning in poor community, and learning in a school with a high number of minority students.

The school leadership team participants solicited included the principal, assistant-principal, curriculum coach, student achievement specialist, and counselor. I selected these participants because they all have been in their respective positions during the last three years, had a direct impact on curriculum implementation, dissected test assessment results, and formulated ways to address poor academic performance, had extensive experiences of working with relatively little resources, worked with a majority minority student population, and understood the local community. Furthermore, several of these team members were products of the school, the school system, and members of the community. This instilled a sense of pride, ownership, and vested interest in the success of the school's students. The variances in these subjects include total years of service, degrees earned, leadership experience, past classroom experience, and gender.

Ultimately, I selected these two groups to answer my research question because they were the only groups that were constant during the timeframe of this research. Although there were

some consistent teachers there during the research timeframe, they were not used because of the ongoing teacher turnover which would limit the number of participants from this group. I did not interview because their experiences with the school did not occur on a daily basis. Their views of the school would mostly come from secondhand information and past deep-rooted perceptions.

Data

The focus of this study was to examine how a high-poverty, high-minority high school in rural Alabama managed to acquire high student achievement. When taking on a case study, the researcher is garnering the perceptions and observations of those that witnessed the occurrence in question. It is important to note that the views of every participant will not be identical. They are merely the facilitators of information for which I was not able to observe myself. But I, the researcher, had to be able discern what information best addressed the research questions to be answered (Stake, 1995). To best address the needs of this case study, the two sources data included interview responses and preexisting documents.

Data Sources

When it comes to deciding on data sources, "the researcher should have a connoisseur's appetite for the best persons, places, and occasions. 'Best' usually means those that best help us understand the case, whether typical or not" (Stake, 1995, p. 56). Of the various methods to garner information in a case study, when one cannot directly observe desired behaviors for the research efforts, he turns to interviews to explore the various experiences and points of view from the participants directly involved. These experiences and points of view range from events that occurred prior to, during, and even following the phenomenon in question (Merriam, 1988).

The structure of the interview process can range from a very structured interview containing a list of predetermined questions to a loose conversational type interview. In the place

of a written survey, oral interviews serve as a tool in which richer detail and descriptions of events are afforded. For the effort of this dissertation, I used a semi-structured interview protocol to administer a consistent set of questions and garner answers related to each question.

Stake (1995) wrote that when performing interviews, each interviewee should not have the exact same questions throughout the interview processes. Interviews are not surveys. The researcher must take into account that each person has had a different experience which lends to the possibility that the interviewees' responses will be different for the questions asked. The interview protocols for both groups reflected the acquisition of the different points of view. Protocol questions posed to the recent graduate participants garnered their points of view as students living in a poor, Alabama Black Belt community and as learners in a school that was fraught with obstacles that attempted to hinder their academic progress. Protocol questions posed to the school leadership team garnered their points of view of improving the academic progress of all students regardless of the students' problems away from school and structuring a conducive learning environment with limited resources.

In addition to interview data, Yin (2009) noted that in order to benefit the most from the evidence collected for research it is best to use a variety of sources in gathering evidence for case studies which provides the investigator to address a myriad of historical and behavioral issues. The advantage for utilizing various evidence sources is that the evidence can be cross-referenced through the triangulation process. Furthermore, the results of compiling and utilizing multiple sources of evidence increases the likelihood of believability.

Nonetheless, the other sources of data for this study derived from preexisting documents. Generally, documents are not generated for research, but in education documents are often generated to improve data driven instruction. Consequently, documents are viewed as a

secondary data source to aid in building and enhancing one's research effort. Here are some advantages for utilizing them. First, "The data found in documents can be used in the same manner as data from interviews or observations. The data can furnish descriptive information, verify emerging hypotheses, advance new categories and hypotheses, offer historical understanding, track change and development, and so on" (Merriam, 1988, p. 108). Second, documentary data cannot be altered by the researcher because this type of data derives from sources over which the researcher has no influence. Lastly, documents serve as a grounding mechanism for research investigation. This means that documents serve as informational anchors and support of the research free from the researcher's influence and biases.

Data Collection

The next thing to consider is the method in which data were collected and recorded. For this case study, I used the audio recording capabilities of both my cellular device and, as a backup, my laptop. There are a couple of benefits to this method. The first benefit is that many people being interviewed often forget that they are being recorded after they become comfortable with the process. This aids with the flow of information and the interviewee's comfort to do so. The second benefit is that the recordings allow for reexamination of what was said during the interview. This allows for reexamination by the researcher and others at a later date (Merriam, 1988).

After each conducted interview the interviewer should reflect on each experience through writing (Merriam, 1988). The importance of post-interview writing is often underestimated. It is in these writings that the interviewer can record aspects of any nonverbal and behavioral interactions during the interviewing process. I created a reflection journal via a Word document to record my post-interview writings. I felt that creating a digital journal was easier for me to

evaluate rather than a hand-written journal. I used triangulation to scrutinized the various data and participant responses. I looked for similarities and differences among the answers and coded them in Atlas.ti. I also looked at the data from the Alabama Department of Education website to determine my findings which are explained in Chapter 4.

Table 4: Research Data Sources

Type of Data	Participants and Examples	Purpose (Merriam, 1988)
1 hour Interviews	Leadership Group Participants: Principal, Assistant-Principal, Student Achievement Specialist, Counselor	Explore the various experiences and points of view from the participants directly involved
1 hour Interviews	Six Former Students	Explore the various experiences and points of view from the participants directly involved
Post Interview Notes	Researcher's Notes	Review aspects of nonverbal and behavioral interaction
Preexisting Documents	Annual Graduation Rates Free/Reduced Lunch Data Curriculum Data Budgeting Data (Title I) Achievement Data	Serves as objective source and grounding mechanism of reliability

Data Analysis

When analyzing case study data, the researcher must depend on his own style of analysis and thinking, whereas with statistical analysis, there are formulas and outlines to guide the researcher (Yin, 2009). "The qualitative researcher concentrates on the instance, trying to pull it apart and put back together again more meaningfully" (p. 75). In an effort to better understand gathered data, case studies "help us tease out relationships, to probe issues, and to aggregate categorical data" (Stake, 1995, p. 77). Stake (1995) further expounded on data analysis saying:

> Keeping in mind that it is the case we are trying to understand, we analyze episodes or text materials with a sense of correspondence. We are trying to understand behavior, issues, and contexts with regard to our particular case. If we have very little time, we try to find the pattern or the significance through direct interpretation, just asking ourselves 'What did that mean?' For more important episodes or passages of text, we must take more time, looking them over again and again, reflecting, triangulating, being skeptical about first impressions and simple meanings. For the evidence most critical to our assertions, we isolate those repetitions and those correspondence tables most pertinent, challenging ourselves as to the adequacy of these data for that assertion. (p. 78)

Traditionally, researchers have searched for tools to best help them analyze the case study data, but the tool selected may only be helpful if the researcher knows what to do with and look for in the evidence collected. The tool's purpose is to "help code and categorize large amounts of narrative text, as might have been collected from open-ended interviews or from large volumes of written materials, such as newspaper articles" (Yin, 2009, p. 129). One of the most effective tools used by case study researchers to organize and manage the data collected is the computer-assisted tool.

Over the decades of computer proliferation, computer-assisted tools in the form of computer software include Atlas.ti, Displaywrite, Easywriter, HyperRESEARCH, Lispqual, NVivo, The Ethnograph, and Wordstar. Although these software programs may prove helpful in data analysis, it is important to note that they do not analyze the data for the researcher. The software merely aides with arranging, coding, and organizing the data which is a substitute for coding using mechanical or physical means. Although software makes coding more efficient, it is still entirely up to the researcher to analyze it (Merriam, 1988; Yin, 2009).

Atlas.ti was the computer-assisted tool used to analyze data retrieved from the interviews and documents. It was suggested by Stake (1995) that during the observation process, it is helpful to determine how data will be coded whether it is through developing one's own coding or through some pre-established coding (Stake, 1995). I opted not to use pre-established coding. Also instead of developing coding during the observation and interview process, I decided to develop codes after inputting the interview transcripts and documents into Atlas.ti.

Coding is a vital component for the organization of research data which includes "obvious factors such as who, what, when, and where, [and further] analysis involves the development of conceptual categories, typologies, or theories that interpret the data for the reader" (Merriam, 1988, p. 133). The procedure of coding involves identifying regularities throughout all the data gathered. Then the researcher determines the number of coding categories to formulate. The number of coding categories should not be too few to avoid generalizations and not so many as to make the research effort unmanageable (Merriam, 1988). After coding, the data were triangulated.

One of the most essential steps in data analysis is triangulation. "For data source triangulation, we look to see if the phenomenon or case remains the same at other times, in other spaces, or as persons interact differently" (Stake, 1995, p. 112). "With data triangulation, the potential problems of construct validity also can be addressed because the multiple sources of evidence essentially provide multiple measures of the same phenomenon" (Yin, 2009, p. 116-117). The sources of data acquired for this study included archival records, interview data from school leaders and former students as well as documents from the school. The table below illustrates the strengths and weakness of the evidence sources used for this case study.

Table 5: Strength of Data Sources Utilized in this Case Study

Source of Evidence	Strengths	Weaknesses
Documentation	• Stable–can be reviewed repeatedly • Unobtrusive–not created as a result of the case study • Exact–contains exact names, references, and details of an event • Broad coverage–long span of time, many events, and many settings	• Retrievability–can be difficult to find • Biased selectivity, if collection is incomplete • Reporting bias–reflects (unknown) bias of author • Access–may be deliberately withheld
Interviews	• Targeted–focuses directly on case study topics • Insightful–provides perceived casual inferences and explanations	• Bias due to poorly articulated questions • Response bias • Inaccuracies due to poor recall • Reflexivity–interviewee fives what interviewer wants to hear

Yin, 2009, p. 102

In determining the best data sources for my research, I believed it was necessary to utilize documentation, archival record, and interview sources of evidence. The use of documentation and archival records encompassed the use of data from the high school, the district school board, and the state board of education website. Because of the strengths mentioned by Yin on the table, I used these data sources because they could be repeatedly reviewed and because the data contained within each source was specific to the school in question. Data from the interviews performed were my primary sources of evidence. I used them because the questions posed directly addressed the research topic and question of the case study. Furthermore, the semi-structured interviews I led prevented deviations from the focus of the study and ensured a concentrated source of evidence were collected.

Despite the analytic strategy or strategies the researcher uses, he should strive to produce a case study analysis of the highest quality. To ensure the highest quality is achieved, the study

analysis should reflect that all evidence, including competing evidence, is extensively addressed in answering the research questions. Furthermore, the data analysis must show focus on the topic with little to no deviations, and showcasing prior knowledge or expertise on the topic also aides with enhancing a quality analysis (Yin, 2009).

During the analysis of the interview transcripts, I identified information that were related to the research question. I searched for various words and ideas that were expressed by the interview participants. Any that I determined were relative and important to the case study were highlighted and coded in to several categories. Those that were mentioned more frequently were kept and the others were either discarded or assimilated into other overarching characteristics. The presence of the characteristics in my study were cross-referenced with those from other studies to determine the similarities and differences between the two. Then the documentary data were cross-referenced with the identified characteristics to determine my findings.

Dependability and Credibility

To solidify the highest quality of analysis, the researcher must take measures ensure the reliability, or dependability, and the validity, or credibility, of the research study. The difference in the two is that validity refers to how research findings are correlated to reality, while reliability refers to the probability that one's research findings can be discovered by others (Merriam, 1995). Yin (2009) identified three principles to address reliability and validity: using multiple sources of evidence, creating a case study database, and maintain a chain of evidence.

The first principle, using multiple sources of evidence, entails utilizing multiple sources of data such as documentation, archival records, interviews, direct observations, and participant observations. Possessing multiple sources of data gives the researcher's argument strength when the various sources can be triangulated for consistencies as mentioned before in the data analysis

section (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015; Yin, 2009). “The use of multiple sources of evidence in case studies allows an investigator to address a broader range of historical and behavioral issues…. Thus, any case study finding or conclusion is likely to be more convincing and accurate if it is based of several different sources of information” (Yin, 2009, p. 115-116).

The second principle is to create a case study database. Creating this database consists of the manner in which information is collected and organized (Merriam, 1988; Yin, 2009). The purpose of creating a database is to open one’s research for further scrutiny by others. Documentation and evidence consists of “two separate collections: 1. the data or evidentiary base and 2. the report of the investigator, whether in article, report, or book form” (Yin, 2009. p. 119).

The last principle is to maintain a chain of evidence. The chain of evidence should “reveal the actual evidence and also indicate the circumstances under which the evidence was collected” (Yin, 2009, p. 123). The chain of evidence must also be consistent with the case study protocol which should clarify the link between it and the study questions. Sticking to this principle also increases the reliability of the principle researcher’s research by allowing an outside observer to study the case from the research question to its conclusion. If the outside observer can take the researcher’s evidence and form the same conclusion, the reliability and validity of the study is stronger.

According to Merriam and Tisdell (2015) credibility, referred to as validity, is a strength of qualitative research when implementing interviews and was the strategy I utilized. Second, is the peer examination in which a peer or college is asked to review the data and report on the likelihood of emerging findings. To accomplish this task, I asked a trusted co-worker who was a secondary English teacher that I knew had great analytical skills. She refused any compensation. Third is for the researcher to make a statement of their experiences pertaining to the study,

assumptions, and biases in reference to the study. Lastly is the submersion in the research for a significant period of time to ensure the best understanding of the study subject or phenomenon (Merriam, 1995).

In reference to reliability, Merriam (1995) identified three strategies to bolster a study's reliability. Like validity, the first strategy is to utilize triangulation with multiple sources of data which I conducted with the interview responses and the documentary data. Also like validity, the second strategy is to employ peer examination. Lastly is the creation and maintenance of an audit trail which can be found in my Appendix D. "In order for an audit trail to take place, the investigator must describe in detail how data were collected, how categories were derived, and how decisions were made throughout the inquiry" (Merriam, 1998, p. 172)

Ethics

As a part of this case study research effort, I used a semi-structured interview protocol which had the potential to invite ethical issues between myself and the participants. It was essential to me and to my case study that the rights of the participants be respected. Personally, I have my own set of ethical values that I believe would suffice to protect the school and participants involved in this study, but my ethical values would not suffice in the realm of educational academia. To address this deficiency and to bolster the assurance of ethical care, I delivered this case study to the University's Institutional Review Board (IRB). According to Roberts (2010), the primary purpose of a college or university's IRB "is the protection of those participating in a research study, particularly around ethical issues such as informed consent, protection from harm, and confidentiality" (p. 32).

I received consent from all participants at the time of the interviews. As a part of their consent to participate, I informed them of any risks they might incur by participating. I reduced

the risk of their name being included in the study by informing them that a pseudonym was used to protect their identity from supervisors, coworkers, local and state educational entities as well as those interested in the study. The benefit of using a pseudonym allowed for the participants to be more candid in their responses without the threat of retribution. In addition to their voluntary consent to participate, I also notified them of the following things:

- the purpose of the study,
- they could discontinue their participation in the interview at any time before, during, and immediately after the interview took place,
- there were no benefits rendered for participation in the study,
- pseudonyms would be used during the transcription of the interview,
- at the conclusion of my dissertation process, all recordings allowed by the participants would be deleted or destroyed to maintain anonymity,
- the only identifying characteristic that would explicitly be used for this research is their ethnic background because of its significance to the study, and
- they would have access to and be provided transcripts of their interview with me for member checking and validation.

(Brinkman & Kvale, 2015; Roberts, 2010)

Prior to beginning the formal research effort, this case study research proposal was provided to the University IRB. The purpose of providing the proposal was to ensure that I addressed all ethical issues such as how I would prevent the dissemination of unwanted participant recognition, ensure the integrity of the research by notifying participants of their voluntary participation, and minimize other risks that might occur. This action afforded an

additional layer of protection and confidentiality for the study participants along with bolstering the credibility of the research.

Assumptions

This study possesses the following assumptions:

1. The interview participants fully understood the questions asked during the interviews.
2. The interview participants were honest and forthcoming with their answers.
3. The researcher asked all interview questions in a semi-structured manner.
4. The student data retrieved from the school were accurate depictions of the state of student academics, socioeconomic status, and ethnicity.

Limitations

Although I chose to perform interviews as the primary method of data collection, there were some inherent limitations of the said method. Some of the first limitations lie with the interviewees. One issue that could have occurred on the part of the interviewees is the presence of ulterior motives for agreeing to participate. To address this concern, I did not offer or promise any monetary gifts or favors for interview participation. Another issue that could have occurred is that the interviewees were giving second-hand perceptions instead of their own of the events in question. The personal perspectives or views lends to "the possibility that information has been distorted or exaggerated" (Merriam, 1988, p. 84). This is the reason I did not choose my participants randomly, but I instead chose them specifically because of their perspectives and views on the dissertation topic. I assumed that these factors would be of no negative consequence to the study, therefore, I also assumed that the quality of the data gathered was of high quality.

When undertaking the task of finding a school for my study, it was not difficult. In full disclosure, I used to teach and coach at Lynnewood High School a couple of years prior to this

study. Having taught there, I knew about the conditions and challenges faced by the school and community prior to the installation of the most recent school administration. When Dr. Brown and her administrative team took over, I had no idea that the graduation percentages would increase so quickly. Although, I no longer taught at the school, I still kept in touch with many of the people and students at the school.

I figured having those relationships would help with recruiting participants to interview. I was mistaken. Of the five members of the school leadership team, there was one person that was reluctant to participate. She did not outright tell me that she did not want to participate, rather she made many empty promises. After a month of ongoing communication, I acquiesced that she was not going to participate and was unable to tell me of her decision. I desperately wanted the additional data from her potential interview responses, but after hearing many of the same themes from the other four participants I decided that I had reached reasonable data saturation.

Relationships with former students did not greatly benefit this study either. Initially, it was my intention to interview four former graduates. I reached out to many of them through social media, and I expected to be overwhelmed with offers to participate. I was profoundly mistaken. There were a couple of responses from social media, but not enough to meet my quota.

To meet my quota, I utilize two other tactics to garner more participants. The first was to attend the school's graduation ceremony and catch a few participants there. I asked my dissertation chairperson if this would present any issues, and he assured me that it was permissible if the participants agreed to participate. Prior to the start of the ceremony, I performed two interviews. Unfortunately, I found out later that there were some others dodging me at the event as to not participate. That was fine because I had met my quota, but I began to

feel that the answers the recent graduates gave me were consistently terse and lacking details. I felt that I would need more than the four interviews I initially thought would be sufficient.

The second tactic I utilized was through word of mouth. At the conclusion of the initial interviews, I asked the participants to reach out to some of their classmates. From this tactic, I garnered two additional participants. I was able to perform one of the interviews through a videophone application due to the participant working in another city. The last interview was from the 2016 valedictorian, and I knew that he would not disappoint. His interview provided greater insights and details to what other participants briefly mentioned. With six former student interviews, I felt better about the data I gathered from the participation group.

At the time of the interviews, all of the participants were either in a four or two-year college or had completed a two-year associate's degree. Missing from this interview group were the potential viewpoints of former students that did not go to college. To get a more well rounded observation of academic success at Lynnewood, it would have been ideal to garner interviews from former students that joined the military, entered the workforce right after school, or were unemployed. Because there were no drop outs during the study period, that point of view would not be needed.

This research was not limited to interviews alone. There were some data pertaining to graduation rates, free or reduced lunch, and academic performance that were gathered. These too, are subject to limitations. The most prominent limitation in reference to the documentary data was the absence of the 2017-2018 graduation and drop out *percentages. Table 9* in Chapter 4 illustrates the missing data. Having that data at the time of this case study would have better cemented my arguments and findings. "In judging the value of a data source, one can ask whether it contains information or insights relevant to the research question and whether it can

be acquired in a reasonably practical yet systematic manner" (Merriam, 1988, p. 105). Stake (1995) mentions that it "is important to spend the best analytic time on the best data. Full coverage is impossible, equal attention to all data is not a civil right" (p. 84).

Another limitation was the absent view points of the teachers. Although Lynnewood has high teacher turnover, the views of both new and veteran teachers might be of great interest. The views of veteran teachers could have provided a seasoned view of what has worked to improve and maintain student academic achievement. The views of new teachers could have provided fresh perspectives on those programs in place and how they improve student academic achievement.

Conclusion

Chapter 3 briefly detailed the purpose of study along with various details pertaining to the acquisition, collection, and analysis of data. I explained and justified the use of the case study methodology and the role of the researcher in the study. This section was followed by the explanation and justification for the selection of the interview participants and the school site of the study. The last section consisted of information pertaining to the sources of, collection of, and analysis of the data, which was followed by measures taken to ensure the reliability and validity of the study. The next two chapters discuss the study findings and the implications of those findings on future research and educational change.

CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS

Introduction

Chapter One mentions a myriad of obstacles that have consistently held back the education of African Americans and other minorities in these United States of America. Because of the oppression that is embedded in our culture, especially in the culture of the southern states, these obstacles are often magnified. This chapter provides the findings to the research question posed in Chapter One; How does a high-minority, high-poverty school in the Rural Black Belt of Alabama garner high student achievement? The findings are organized in reference to the responses provided by the participation groups solicited and then by supporting supplemental data.

Presentation of Descriptive Characteristics of Participants

To assess the presence of a high-poverty, high-minority, high-achieving (HPMA) school, I interviewed the School Leadership Team (SLT) as well as participants from the Recent Graduate Group (RGG). Each group had a different interview protocol that was tailored to gather information from their specific points of view (see Appendix A). The following tables provide information about the participants.

Table 6: SLT Participants

Participant	Position	Years on Lynnewood SLT	Lynnewood Graduate
Dr. Brown	Principal	2014-2018	Yes
Mr. King	Assistant Principal	2014-2018	Yes
Mrs. Lanier	Student Achievement Specialist	2014-2018	Yes
Ms. Tucker	Counselor	2014-2018	No

Lynnewood High School had five people that were a part of the SLT. Of the five, four participated. All of the members of the SLT were hired or transferred to Lynnewood at the beginning of the 2014-2015 school year. Prior to that school year Dr. Brown was principal at

another school in the district, Mr. King was an instructional coach, Mrs. Lanier was an instructional coach, and Ms. Tucker was the counselor at Dr. Brown's previous school. Furthermore, of the four participants, three are graduates of Lynnewood which could indicate a vested interest in the school, community, and students that walked the same halls they did.

Table 7: RGG Participants

Participant	Gender	Year Graduated	Post-Graduation Activities	All 4 Years at Lynnewood
Adrienne	Woman	2016	Enrolled at 4-Year College	No
Aubrey	Woman	2015	Enrolled at 4-Year College	Yes
Eric	Man	2016	Enrolled at 4-Year College	Yes
Marie	Woman	2016	Enrolled at 2-Year College	No
Michael	Man	2017	Welding School/Working	Yes
Teboris	Man	2016	Enrolled at 4-Year College	Yes

There were six former students of Lynnewood High School that participated in interviews: three men and three women. There was one 2015 graduate, four 2016 graduates, and one 2017 graduate. Five of the participants were enrolled in four-year colleges throughout the state of Alabama at the time of the study, one attended a welding program after graduating and was working as a welder, and one was enrolled in a local community college. Four of the participants spent all four of their high school years at Lynnewood. Two did not and only attended one year there because the school district closed their previous school due to decreased enrollment. This was a separate consolidation from the one that occurred in 2009, and after this consolidation in 2015 the minority population stayed the same. The few white students that attended the closed schools did not transfer to Lynnewood. Yet, this is another instance of white flight and the normalcy of racism as an everyday occurrence. Furthermore, none of the participants represent or provide the viewpoints of recent graduates that went directly to work, entered the military, or dropped out of school.

Findings

In the initial analysis of the interview transcripts there were a total of 28 themes identified between both groups. The following table lists the 28 themes in the first column and they are listed with the most identified theme listed first. The second column is dedicated to the number of times each theme was identified in the SLT transcripts. The third column illustrates the same function from the RGG transcripts. The total number of identified themes, regardless of their label, is located at the bottom of both group columns: 216 identified themes for the SLT and 141 for RGG. The total number of times a theme was identified is listed in the last column named "Total # (Number) of Quotations by Theme." Located at the bottom of the forth column lies the grand total of themes identified throughout the interviews, which is 357 total themes identified.

Table 8: List of Identified Themes by Group

Theme	SLT	RGG	Total # Quotations by Theme
Overcoming Interior Barriers	44	6	50
Incresing Academic Performance	26	20	46
Interior Barriers	29	12	41
Building Relationships On Campus	26	6	32
Exterior Barriers	20	11	31
Administration Strengths	13	16	29
Overcoming Exterior Barriers	17	6	23
High Expectations	16	6	22
Teacher Strengths	5	17	22
School Programs (Non-academic)	9	12	21
Parental Involvement	12	8	20
Collaboration on Campus	19	0	19
Teacher Retention	16	1	17
Building Relationships with Communit	10	6	16
Leadership Quality	13	0	13
Professional Development	13	0	13
School Safety	5	8	13
Student Perception of School	0	13	13
Teacher Weaknesses	7	6	13
Administrative Weaknesses	3	9	12
School Academic Programs	5	6	11
Student Development	3	7	10
Student Discipline	3	6	9
Teacher Student Relationships	3	5	8
Post High School Track	0	6	6
Teacher Quality	6	0	6
Acknowledging Sucess	3	2	5
Daily Operations (Non-Academic)	4	0	4
Total # Quotations by Group	216	141	357

According to *Table 7,* the theme "Overcoming Interior Barriers" was identified the most by the SLT, but it is also significant that the theme "Increasing Academic Performance" was identified a comparable number of times with a high frequency by both groups: 26 times by the SLT and 20 by the RGG. The "Overcoming Interior Barriers" theme should not be confused with the "Interior Barriers" theme. The latter represents the participants' perceptions of the presence of barriers in the school, and the former represents their perceptions of how barriers were overcome at the school.

It is also important to note the themes that had not been identified by the RGG. The zeros by "Post High School Track" and "Student Perception of School" are exclusive reflections of characteristics pertaining to the RGG. The remaining themes the bare zeros next to them are not exclusive reflections of characteristics from either group.

Although it is fascinating to look at the number of times a theme was identified, for this research it was more important to look at all of the identified themes. Acknowledging the themes that occurred allows for the correlation of themes that occurred in past research efforts pertaining to HPMA Schools. To better facilitate the correlation, the themes were amassed into seven master themes: Academics, Administration, Exterior Influences, Interior Influences, Relationships, School Operations, and Teachers. These themes were created to provide organization and structure to the findings, conclusions, and implications.

Chapter two mentions several characteristics that both challenged and supported HPMA schools in other studies. Those characteristics or themes that challenged other HPMA school were student living conditions, parental and family support, poverty, funding for education, school conditions, and teacher turnover. According to Brown and Green (2014) as well as Kannapel, Clements, Taylor, and Hibpshman (2005), the characteristic that supported academic

gains included but were not limited to school leadership, collaboration, professional development, student assessment data, student interventions, high expectations, relationships, faculty work ethic and moral, and teacher recruitment, hiring, and assignment. To some degree, these characteristics were identified in the evaluation of the participant interview transcripts.

The interviews transcripts served as two of the three sources that contributed to the findings. The first source was the SLT which consisted of the principal, assistant principal, counselor, and student achievement specialist. The second source consisted of six students that graduated from Lynnewood High School within the previous four years spanning from 2015 to 2017. No participants were solicited from the 2018 graduating class because all of them were under the age of nineteen at the time of this study. The third source was a collection of preexisting data that was retrieved from the Alabama Department of Education website.

Between the first two sources, there were 28 themes identified from the interview transcripts of the SLT and RGG participants. The 28 themes were further synthesized into seven master themes: Academics, Administration, Exterior Influences, Interior Influences, Relationships, School Operations, and Teachers. The *Table 10* outlines the seven master themes along with the subthemes that correlate to them. It is noteworthy that some of the subthemes under the master themes "Exterior Influences" and "Interior Influences" are also located under the master theme labeled "Relationships" because of the importance relationships around the school.

The first theme, Academics, was significant because of the role it played in the success of the students. Ragland et al. (2002) mentioned how schools that struggled with academic gains first acknowledged there was an issue with student academics, then studied the issue, and planned interventions to address the issue. Similarly, Lynnewood made strides to improve

student academic gains. The three subthemes that were discovered that influenced academics were Acknowledging Success, Increasing Academic Performance, and School Academic Programs.

Table 9: Master Themes

Academics	Admin-istration	Exterior Influences	Interior Influences	Relation-ships	School Operations	Teachers
• Acknowledging Success • Increasing Academic Performance • School Academic Programs	• Administration Strengths • Administrative Weakness • Leadership Quality	• Building Relationships w/ Community • Exterior Barriers • Overcoming Exterior Barriers • Parental Involvement	• Building Relationships on Campus • Collaboration on Campus • High Expectations • Interior Barriers • Overcoming Interior Barriers • School Safety • Student Development • Student Discipline • Teacher Student Relationships	• Building Relationships w/ Community • Building Relationships on Campus • Teacher Student Relationships	• Daily Operations • Professional Development • School Programs (Non-academic)	• Teacher Quality • Teacher Retention • Teacher Strengths • Teacher Weaknesses

The participants from both groups noted that honors day assemblies were regularly held to acknowledge the students that made the honor roll, and this made those students feel encouraged about their academic progress. Ms. Tucker, the counselor, stated in her interview "I think acknowledging our kids' successes, we do pretty well as far as like on honors day – recognizing the ones that have done well. But we also encourage the ones who are not [doing as well]." Hence the presence of other responses that addressed academic encouragement that included the implementation of academic pep rallies before the administration of standardized tests, coaches holding their athletes accountable for subpar grades, and the implementation of a class period during the school day solely dedicated to academic interventions and improving standardized test scores.

These activities were evidence of some of the many programs Lynnewood High School put in place over the past four years to address students' academic performance. Dr. Brown stated that "When I first got here that summer [of 2014], I did an analysis of the failure list. We

had seventy-seven students that had failed at least two subjects – two courses. And I'm not talking about electives." The implementation of a variety of academic based programs have helped to turn around the academic standing of many of their students which is a strength that Krovez and Arriaza (2006) and Reeves (2005) stated must be possessed of an effective principal.

The second theme, Administration, addressed the strengths, weaknesses and leadership qualities of the administrative team. Lynnewood did not have a traditional leadership team consisting of a principal and assistant principal(s). A mini-leadership team that consisted of not only the principal and the assistant principal but also the counselor, a student achievement specialist, and an instructional coach was created. It was from this group that the SLT derived. All of which divulged their various activities and responsibilities that were geared to increasing and maintaining student academic progress. Kannapel et al. (2005) and Parrett and Budge (2012) reported in their studies that shared leadership was a trait that effective principals employed in the management of their schools. Such was the case here.

Conversely, the SLT also mentioned a couple of things that they perceive as weaknesses in their endeavor to improve the school such as leadership turnover, multiple job responsibilities, and building relationships with parents. RGG participants also mentioned the rampant leadership turnover prior to the current leadership. Despite the high turnover, Dr. Brown was the first principal in a decade to tenure the office for more than three years. Additionally, RGG participants mentioned the need for an additional assistant principal, the counselor often being out of the office, and a desire for more student activities.

It should be mentioned that the school leadership team is a direct reflection of the student population that they serve. Three of them are Lynnewood graduates and all the of them are African American. I believe that this is an asset to the students of Lynnewood High School

because the team understands the struggles and challenges of the local community and of being African American in the United States. This plays into the first tenant of the Critical Race Theory (CRT) which states that racism is something that is dealt with every day (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012). People within the same cultural identity understand one another better than those of from other cultures. Consequently, Lynnewood's SLT should best understand the struggles of obtaining an education as African Americans which, in turn, helps them to make the best decisions to best benefit the student population they served.

The third theme, Exterior Influences, addressed those things or entities outside of the school campus that worked against and for student academic achievement. Participants noted that some of the exterior influences that worked against student achievement on campus were the lack of parental involvement, parents needing students to go to work, the lack of value in education, the need for stronger relationships between the school and the community, the negative perception of the school from past events, student living conditions, a small tax base to fund the local education system, and poverty. Many of these same conditions were identified by Krovetz and Arriaza (2006) as external characteristics that other HPMA school had to overcome. Although the term "overcome" was used by the authors, I believe that many of these characteristics are not truly overcome by HPMA schools; they are acknowledged and used as motivational tools to improve students' academic advancement as well as their perception of the importance of education.

In reference to the external characteristics pertaining to the lack of value in education, student living conditions, and poverty, this short anecdote given by Dr. Brown exemplifies the plight of educating in the community:

> Our parents have gotten themselves in a financial bind where they are not concerned if their children are successful in life. They just need them to find a job, and the job can be at McDonalds. It can be at Piggly Wiggly. They just need – they just want those children to have a job so that they can have an extra income, and that is extremely sad for me. And I don't even know how you break that cycle because one of the things I try to do – I try to go into The Village [Apartments], and I have a particular student that graduated two years ago. Her grandmother lived in The Village. Her mother lived in The Village. She has an older sister that was there until she decided that this is not for [her]. And, so she left and went to the Armed Forces. But this particular young lady called me probably a month or two ago and asked me – she said "Dr. Brown I need help. I really don't want to live like this anymore." And so, it's trying to break that vicious cycle when you have parents that don't value education. It is extremely hard for those students that want to do something better. (Dr. Brown, personal communication, May 15, 2018)

The participant responses also bared many exterior influences that existed that they felt improved the academic performances of the students. Some of those influences included communicating with the local police department for updates on local activities, inviting employment agencies to come on campus to hire juniors and graduating seniors, inviting church organizations into the school, and building relationships within the community. To facilitate these links with the community, the school used social media, word of mouth, teachers calling parents, physically going out into the community, and the local newspaper to open communication and disseminate positive news about the things going on at Lynnewood.

The fourth theme, Interior Influences, addressed those activities and entities on the school campus that worked against and on behalf of student achievement. Some of the interior barriers

that participants mentioned that challenged student academic achievement included the consolidation to only two high school, the lack of academic prowess in previous years, gangs, fear among teachers and students, an unfavorable school climate, teacher turnover, a heavy presence of new teachers, a lack of school funds, and a lack of student diversity. Unfortunately, the presence of these barriers is indicative of why CRT theorists, such as Ladson-Billings (1998), argue that the education system is set up to fail African Americans and other minorities in great numbers by ignoring their racial, social, and educational needs. To counter these barriers, it was mentioned that the school culture and climate was changed in the past four years by putting the mini-leadership team in place; improving school safety by implementing a zero-tolerance policy and other disciplinary measures; facilitating collaboration between the school administrative team, teachers, students, and other stakeholders; building meaningful relationships all over campus; creating ways to ensure students have what they need to be academically successful; increasing teacher professional development opportunities; and incorporating a culture of high expectations.

The fifth theme, Relationships, is different from the other themes because of its ties to the Exterior and Interior Influences. It was not an initial theme that derived from the detected subthemes created. The difference with this master theme is that all of its subthemes are also located under other master themes on *Table 9*. The rational for creating the "Relationships" master theme is that it could stand on its own while the subthemes listed within are also descriptive of other master themes. Additionally, it was necessary to create the relationships master theme because there are similar or the same themes present in other studies pertaining to HPMA schools.

Kearney et al. (2012) reported in their study of 90-90-90 schools that meaningful relationships among stakeholders helps enable the school to obtain the support it needs in terms of fund raising and volunteering. Building relationships was a major objective for Lynnewood to implement, yet it was not on par with Herbert High School, the only other high school in the district, which has a greater percentage of white students that African Americans. This master theme was created because of the number of times and how relationships were discussed in participant interviews. The three types of relationships presented under this master them are Building Relationships with the Community, Building Relationships on Campus, and Teacher Student Relationships.

The leadership at the school managed to create several ways to build relationships with the surrounding communities in which their students lived. As previously stated, the school leadership met with local law enforcement on a regular basis to discuss the activities going on in the community. This was an essential relationship to maintain because the information that was shared with the principal sometimes involved the students at the school. The information was then shared with the faculty and staff to prevent issues from coming on campus and to make sure the teachers were aware. Other relationships between the school and the community included reaching out to parents to carpool students without transportation, soliciting judges and attorneys for neckties for the male students, parents calling for help with issues at home, and teachers along with school administration attending non-school related activities to show their support.

Relationships on campus occurred in various ways as well. One of which was the relationships between the administration and the students. The participants gave various examples of positive interactions between them. One RGG participant, Aubrey, stated that “Dr. Brown was my mentor. She stayed on me about my work and stayed on me about anything

outside of school that didn't have to deal with work. She taught me a lot, and because of her, I have successfully grown." This type of relationship was not limited to the principal and students, but it also included the other members of the leadership teams as well as the teachers. Michael, another RGG participant noted that "we had teachers and principals that set there and talked to us!" As mentioned by participants, the only downside to building relationships with teachers is that there was no guarantee that the teachers they built relationships with would return the next school year.

The last relationship that was discussed by the participants was that of the relationships among the students. Eric, an RGG participant, stated "At Lynnewood, everybody knew everybody. It was like everybody was brother and sister." Other mentions of this type of relationship from other participants included stories of how there were bonds created and how classmates would encourage one another and challenge each other toward academic success. It was noteworthy that some of the members of the RGG mentioned the lack of and the need for interactions with students from other cultures when they were in school. This was not always the case.

It would be neglectful not to mention that as late at the 2009, Lynnewood High School had a "white" counterpart within its vicinity. In fact, the students from both schools played together as a single athletic entity in every sport. When the schools were forced to consolidate into one school, white flight occurred. White flight is the moving of white students away from schools with an increased number of African Americans and other minorities. This is an action that was employed by whites after the *Brown v. Board of Education* (1956) case in the years after its ruling. Over fifty years later, white flight occurred at Lynnewood, and despite the best intentions of the local school board, almost all the white students relocated to Herbert High

School. Ladson-Billings (1998) argued that curriculum, instruction, assessment, school funding, and desegregation, were the five areas in the education system in which CRT should be used to better balance educational inequities. Such is the discussion and argument for Lynnewood in this research.

The sixth theme, School Operations, addressed the activities on campus that seemed to indirectly influence academic achievement at Lynnewood. Specifically, these activities did not involve the presence of students but influenced student outcomes in roundabout ways. The daily operations that were mentioned include the daily mini-leadership team meeting and the morning announcements. This is analogous to what Jensen (2013) mentions as the ability of a school leader's ability to be open to other people's ideas, feedback, and ongoing support to the school. The mini-leadership team met every morning to discuss a daily plan of action and any pressing issues that may need to be addressed during the course of the day. The morning announcements are just like those at other schools except in one regard. Ms. Tucker stated "we try to [announce] motivational comments from administrators simply telling kids 'I love you' every day because some of them may not hear it." This is not only a function that happens every day, it is also a way to build relationships and to create a caring school environment.

Another school operation that indirectly influenced academic achievement was the presence of ongoing professional development for teachers and administration team members. Most notably, the school leadership team provided embedded professional development every Thursday during every teachers' planning period, and these professional development sessions were based on the needs of the teachers instead of what administration thought they needed. Dr. Brown mentioned "Before, we were doing professional development on Thursdays based on what we wanted them to know. But, its more beneficial when you know exactly what the

teachers need assistance with. And so, Mrs. James [the instructional coach] does a poll, and they will tell her 'I need help with Excel or need help with doing whatever'." This finding was encouraging because in the HPMA school study conducted by Kannapel et al. (2005), it was found that it was beneficial to teachers when school leaders facilitated in-house professional development in an ongoing basis, and when professional development is beneficial to teachers, it is also beneficial to students.

Yet, not all professional development occurred on campus. In addition to a variety of off campus professional development opportunities provided by the local school board and other partnering entities, Dr. Brown noticed that it was very important to improve the teacher student relationships. So, a team of administrators and teachers were sent to professional development opportunities specifically geared toward improving those relationships by addressing students in positive ways. After attending the session, the team came back to campus and facilitated a professional development session with the teachers to share what they learned. Again, these actions by school leaders were also identified in the Kannapel study.

The last theme discussed by the participants, Teachers, addressed teacher strengths as well as some things that may have diminished student achievement. The identified strengths of the teachers at Lynnewood included their ability to work together, their eagerness and desires to help students achieve, their perceived enjoyment of teaching, and their dedication to making a difference. There were many examples of these attributes provided by participants from both interview groups in which they partly credited the teachers with increasing students' academic performance. Mrs. Tucker of the SLT group stated, "I think the strength [of the teachers] is the desire to want to help our kids succeed. Because I feel like if you have that as a teacher, you're

going to go above and beyond to reach the kid that nobody else thinks is going to make it." One RGG participant, Teboris, said the following:

> They [teachers] are very open, very encouraging, very –how would I put it- they never seemed like they didn't care. They weren't apathetic about it, and even though you had teachers of different races or nationalities, they never seemed like they thought that we were less than other high schools because we were African Americans. They never felt like that we were less.

Adrienne, another RGG participant stated:

> We had really good teachers that really believed in us and wanted us to be successful, and pushed us. Cause not all of the time we wanted to do it, but they went the extra mile to like help us out. Like "hey, you need to do this, and hey you need to study for this. You need to be thinking about your future. You need to invest in your future or something like that."

But, there were some concerns when it came to the teaching staff at Lynnewood. The most notable and overwhelming weakness mentioned by the SLT participants was the ongoing teacher turnover rate. Ms. Tucker stated it best when she said "I think our weakness is our turnover as far as having new teachers every year. You know, because it is hard build relationships with students when [they are] here this year, but [they] have to move on to go somewhere else next year." Because of this occurrence, Lynnewood has a perpetual group of new teachers every year, and one of the school's strengths, professional development, can be rendered ineffective when there is a presence of high teacher turnover. This is due to the constant repetition of the same or similar professional development sessions where veteran teachers must attend sessions that they have frequented before. Although these opportunities may be beneficial

to a constant flow of new teachers, like the one at Lynnewood, they will cause the veteran teachers to view them as a waste of time (Guin, 2004).

Another result of high teacher turnover is the ongoing acquisition of teachers from the Teach for America Program. Teach for America (TFA) teachers are often obtained to teach math and science classes because of the scarcity of those specialty teachers. The TFA teachers are those that did not go to college for education, are only obligated to stay for two years, and oftentimes did not major in math or science. With many of the TFA teachers opting out of education after two years as well as the loss of other traditional teachers annually, the academic achievement of students may have been in jeopardy year after year. Yet, despite the constant turnover, Lynnewood students still managed to excel.

Unfortunately, the high teacher turnover and repetitive cycles of professional development and implementations of teaching strategies that are said to fix the achievement gap, are symptoms of the education system failing African American students. Such was the argument by Ladson-Billings (1998) which led her to stress the importance of creating education systems or structures that cater to the strengths and educational needs of minorities. Fortunately, it is evident in some of the interview responses that the school leadership does appear to cater to the strengths and needs of their student body. Yet, more radical adjustments to the instruction and curriculum are suppressed by the curriculum and standards mandated by local and state educational authorities. In fact, one participant stated the following about the teachers:

> Now for weaknesses - I wouldn't really fault this on the teachers, but maybe the teaching standards that they have to go by that's enforced by Alabama Board of Education. Maybe that was a weakness. Cause it seemed like it really simplified things to the point where they were too simple, and you didn't really learn as much. So, that could be a problem

when you are preparing for college. (Mrs. Lanier, personal communication, June 10, 2018)

The quote by Carter G. Woodson that was first mentioned in Chapter 2 best sums up this characterization. He stated, "the same educational process which inspires and stimulates the oppressor with the thought that he is everything and has accomplished everything worthwhile, depresses and crushes at the same time the spark of genius in the Negro by making him feel that race does not amount to much and never will measure up to the standards of other people" (Woodson, 2000, p. xix). Woodson's words of the oppressing majority still holds true today and despite ongoing opposition, Lynnewood students still managed to excel.

All of the proceeding data derived from the SLT and RGG participants, the first two sources. Again, the third source of information came from preexisting data. The following charts illustrate the student enrollment and other data pertinent for determining schools' HPMA status.

Table 10: Lynnewood HPMA Data Numbers for Each Cohort Year

	2014-2015	2015-2016	2016-2017	2017-2018
School Enrollment	348	464	425	402
Minority Percentage	100%	100%	100%	100%
Graduation Percentage	87%	93%	93%	*
Drop Out Percentage	0%	0%	0%	*
Free or Reduced Lunch	93%	80%	88%	94%
----------The following is not used as HPMA Data----------				
AL Failing Schools List	No	Yes	Yes	*

* Indicates data were not available at the time of this research.

The table above illustrates five data items that validate the presence of a HPMA school: school enrollment, minority percentage, graduation percentage, drop out percentage, and free or reduced lunch. The same or similar data items were used by other research efforts to identify HPMA schools and used by various educational entities to award schools for exceptional academic achievement. The available data primarily spans over the three school years 2014-2015, 2015-2016, and 2016-2017. For the 2017-2018 school year, three of the data items listed

do not have official data from the Alabama Department of Education available because the school year ended around the time of this research effort, and the data was not yet published. The last data item, the Alabama Failing Schools List, is not a data item used to identify HPMA schools in Alabama but may have a bearing on local, state and national academic curricula, education standards, and educational recognitions.

The Alabama Failing Schools List is significant to this study because of the manners in which it was conceived and implemented. The State Legislature, none of which are current educators, is responsible for conceiving this tool to identify and label schools in reference to their academic achievement. The Alabama State Department of Education (ALSDE) had little to no input on the writing of this Act but is wholly responsible for enforcing it. According to the most recent version Alabama Accountability Act (2013) at the time of this study, the ALSDE was mandated to only use standardized measuring tools or assessments to gauge if a school performed in the bottom six percent of the all of the public schools in the state. Any school that performed below this threshold on the ACT for secondary students or the ACT Aspire Assessment for primary students, despite any academic gains, was labeled a failing school.

The ACT assessment was only given to tenth graders state-wide every year without giving each cohort a second chance to retest or a chance to prove academic success through other means. Such assessment have been documented to be racially biased to benefit whites. Considering the use of racially biased assessments as a part of the Act, its inception and other mechanisms utilized to make it function lends to the second tenant of CRT in which decisions benefiting African Americans are not made without first benefiting whites. This Act, with its racially biased assessment and resulting failing schools list, does not help minority and rural schools. It merely places labels on schools through a one-time snapshot instead of a

comprehensive and expansive study of academic success. Lynnewood is a high-minority, rural school that has acquired the failing school label without a wide-ranging examination. Furthermore, I did not use the Alabama Failing Schools List for the same reason I did not use the ACT assessment as a measurement of academic achievement; they are both rooted in and have intersectionality in racial biases and affluence.

Academic recognitions are not essential to determining if a school is an HPMA school, but there are three recognitions or awards that use poverty, minority, and achievement levels to determine recognition status. I used the 90-90-90 School, Blue Ribbon School of Excellence, and the Torchbearer School recognitions to determine if Lynnewood was worthy of recognition for their students' academic performances using the graduation percentages during the study period. The following table illustrates how Lynnewood High School compared.

Table 11: Lynnewood vs. HPMA Names and Recognitions

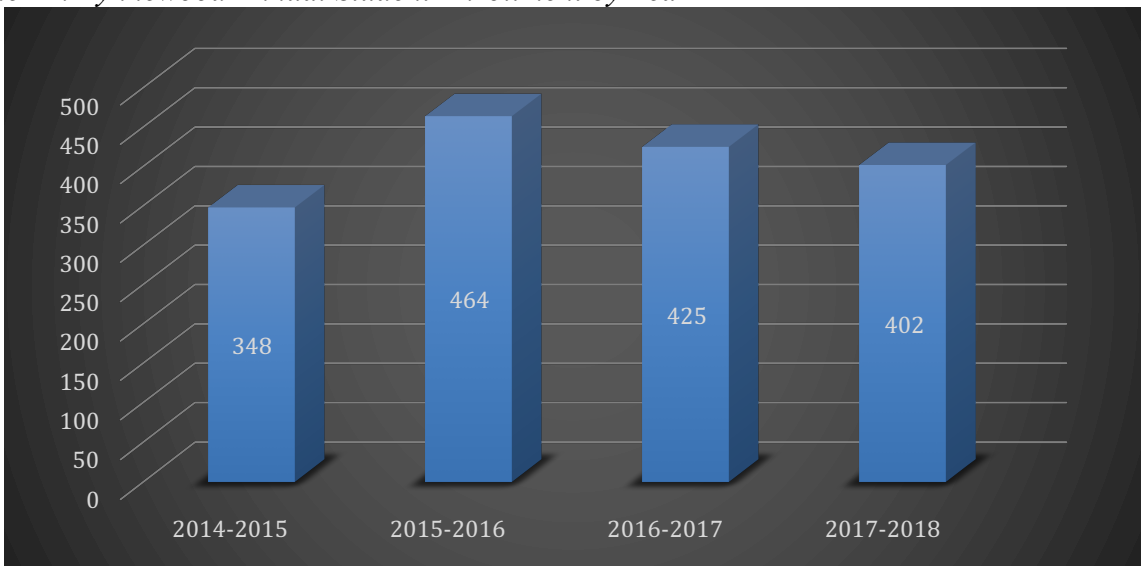
Other HPMA Names/Recognitions	High Poverty	High Minority	High Achievement
90-90-90 Schools	90%	90%	90%
National Blue Ribbon School	40% underserved or disadvantaged	Not specified but required	Must be in top 15% of state
Torchbearer School	80%	Not specified but required	At or above state average (89%-90%)
Lynnewood High School	93%, 80%, 88%, 94%	100% All Four Years	87%, 93%, 93%, NA

*Lynnewood's percentages represent the 2014-15 to 2017-18 school years respectively.

Table 11 illustrates the school poverty, minority, and achievement requirements for schools to be recognized by the listed entities in rows two, three, and four. Row five illustrates Lynnewood's percentages for each school year of the study in reference to each required field. Green means that Lynnewood met the criteria, red means it did not meet the criteria, and yellow means it met the criteria but not consistently. Lynnewood was a 90-90-90 school for one school year, but the data was not consistent enough. It met the poverty and minority criteria to be a Blue Ribbon School of Excellence, but did not meet the requirement of being in the top 15 percent of schools in the state as determined by the Alabama Failing Schools List which is determined by racially biased standardized tests. I argue that Lynnewood may have a fighting chance to obtain this recognition providing standardized test results were not used. Lynnewood could be recognized as a Torchbearer School because it consistently met all the requirements of that recognition consistently.

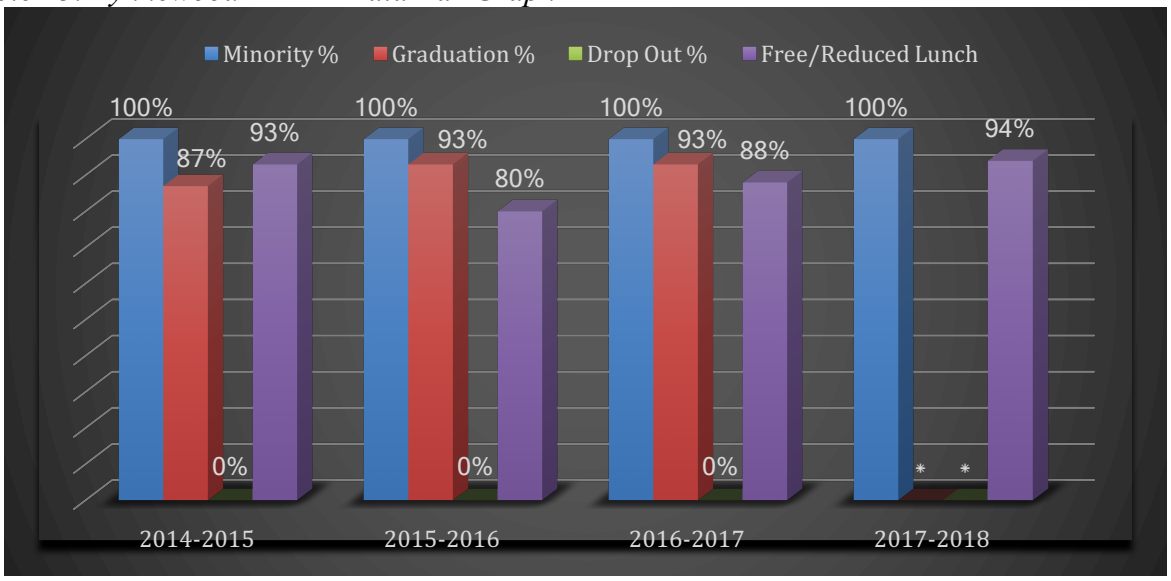
Conversely, the requirements for both the Torchbearer School and the Nation Blue Ribbon School recognitions leaves room for schools with relatively lower minority and impoverished student populations to obtain these recognitions. The National Blue Ribbon School recognition has a relatively low, 40 percent, student poverty requirement and a vague minority requirement. This unfairly opens up this recognition to schools that may have access to more resources and higher white student populations, especially those in the top 15 percent in a state that may already perform academically at high levels because of the presence of those resources. The Torchbearer School recognition is more favorable for HPMA schools, yet the lack of specificity for the minority requirement also opens the possibility of the recognition going to schools with higher white student populations. Again, racism is a normal, everyday occurrence that also affects the recognition of schools with high academic achievement.

Table 12: Lynnewood Annual Student Enrollment by Year



In the four years observed in this study, the number of students enrolled at Lynnewood was not constant. During the 2014-2015, the total school enrollment stood at 348 students. During the 2015-2016 school year, there was a significant jump in the total school enrollment. This was due to the closing of two K-12 community schools in the district. The enrollment at Lynnewood would have been higher had it not been for the white flight mentioned earlier in this chapter. The schools were closed due to a consistent decrease in student enrollment district wide, and the students from those schools were divided between the two elementary, middle, and high schools respectively. The remaining two school years on the table illustrate the continued decrease in student enrollment after the school consolidation. Despite the move of students from the other schools which raised student enrollment, Lynnewood High School managed to maintain high standards befitting of a HPMA high school as the enrollment began to decrease. The outcomes from each year are illustrated in the following table.

Table 13: Lynnewood HPMA Data Bar Graph



Lynnewood maintained a one-hundred percent minority rate over the four-year reporting period. The information retrieved from the Alabama Department of Education website indicated that there were no students at Lynnewood that represented the majority. Conversely, the reports indicated that all students were minorities of African American decent. In other studies, HPMA schools possessed similar minority percentages. The 90-90-90 schools studied by Kearney and Herrington (2010) and Kearney, Herrington, and Aguilar (2012) possessed student bodies consisting of at least a 90% minority makeup. Neither the National Blue Ribbon Schools Program (2018) nor the Torchbearer Schools Program (2014) required a certain number or percentage of minorities present in a selected school. Therefore, Lynnewood did not have an advantage to be named a candidate school for these award programs but could not be disqualified either because of the minority population.

As for the graduation percentages, during the 2014-2015 school year, it was at 87%. That was two percentage points below the state average graduation percentage that year. The next year the state graduation average remained at 89%, yet Lynnewood's graduation percentage was greater at 93% for the next two years. During the 2016-2017 school year, the state's graduation

percentage increased to 90%, which was lower than that of Lynnewood High School. Although the graduation percentage for 2017-2018 was not yet published by the Alabama Department of Education at the time of this reporting, the graduation percentage for Lynnewood was trending at or above the state average in a consistent manner which is the same requirement for Torchbearer School status.

In the 90-90-90 schools studies, the high schools observed obtained 90-90-90 status according to whether they maintained a 90% or greater graduation percentage. If the trend holds true, Lynnewood is well on its way to consistently producing these graduation percentages making it a HPMA high school. Although the National Blue Ribbon Schools program does not require a certain graduation percentage, it does utilize graduation rates as well as other state accountability indicators. It also requires that high schools rank in the top 15% of all the high schools in the state. Lynnewood may have acquired a substantial graduation percentage, yet it was placed on the Alabama Failing Schools List because of students' performances on state administered standardized tests that have been known to not cater to the educational strengths of minority students. In a study by White et al. (2016), it was found that African Americans lack the language proficiency for such standardized test especially when they come from schools with high percentages of students that receive free and reduced lunch, and such may be the case at Lynnewood.

One may argue that the graduates of Lynnewood might have been "passed on" from one grade to the next and even granted graduation as opposed to earning that privilege. The participants of both the RGG and SLT groups affirmed otherwise. In reference to participating in the school's honor society, Teboris stated, "they [the honor society sponsors] really pushed you to have your GPA above a 3.5, so that motivated me to keep rising up and to keep going from

where I was from ninth grade onwards." In reference to the teachers having high expectations of students, Eric stated, "Our teachers would keep on us and they wouldn't stop. And, that's a reason why a lot of our class is successful today, and [are] on our way to success!"

I found it interesting that the administration team included the Student Specialist position which is specifically there for helping students succeed. The Student Specialist, Mrs. Lanier, stated, "That's why I love my new role as student achievement specialist because I deal just with students, and making sure they get what they need in order to be successful whether it's a pencil for class or a résumé or whatever for scholarship applications." This position is a sign of the seriousness and dedication they have for expecting high academic achievement specifically from the students.

The dropout percentage was consistent as well. Reports from the Alabama Department of Education showed that Lynnewood maintained a 0% dropout rate during the first three years of this study. Like the graduation rate, the dropout percentage for the 2017-2018 school year was not available from the Alabama Department of Education at the time of this reporting. The graduation percentage was not the only thing trending in a consistent fashion. The dropout rate was trending consistently at 0%. Although the dropout rate is not a factor for HPMA status, it does factor into the overall graduation percentage year after year.

Lynnewood's free and reduced lunch percentage was not as consistent. This element was totally dependent on the students turning in the lunch forms to the school every year. The table indicated that prior to the school consolidations during the 2015-2016 school year, the 2014-2015 free and reduced lunch percentage was 93%. The year of the consolidation, the percentage dropped to 80% for unknown reasons. In the following two school years, the free and reduced lunch percentage increased to eighty-eight during the 2016-2017 school year and 94% during the

2017-2018 school year. To be considered as a National Blue Ribbon School, there is a mandate that one-third of the selected schools have student enrollments consisting of 40% underserved or disadvantaged students, which is determined by the number of students receiving free or reduced lunch. For Torchbearer School status, an 80% free and reduced lunch status is required. Lynnewood's free and reduced lunch percentages more than double the requirement for National Blue Ribbon School status and is consistently adequate for Torchbearer School status. On the other hand, Lynnewood did not consistently possess a 90% or better free and reduced lunch rate over the four-year period observed as needed for 90-90-90 status. Considering the school consolidations and that the school still managed to possess greater than 80% free and reduced lunch percentage over the four-year period, Lynnewood was worthy of high-poverty status.

Summary

The purpose of this study was to determine how a HPMA high school could be present in the poor, rural Black Belt Region of Alabama. Other known HPMA schools across the country bare similar or the same findings as Lynnewood High School. The master themes and their subsidiary themes regarding to academics, school administration, exterior influences, interior influences, relationships, school operations, and teachers were discovered throughout the participants' transcripts from their verbal responses and are synonymous with other studies. Furthermore, the data retrieved in reference to Lynnewood High School such as the percentages of minority students on campus, the percentages of seniors graduating annually, the percentages of students that dropped out in each cohort, and the percentages of free or reduced lunch students on campus are consistent with other HPMA schools. The only inconsistency, in reference to being labeled a HPMA school, is that Lynnewood was placed on the Alabama Failing Schools List for the past two years. Despite this labeling dictated by Alabama legislation, Lynnewood is

poised for recognition as a Torchbearer School and possibly others with more consistent poverty percentages and non-biased achievement measurement tools. In Chapter Four, the findings from the interviews of two participant groups and supporting data were presented. The significance of these findings are discussed with greater detail in Chapter Five: Conclusion.

CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSIONS, IMPLICATIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to determine how a high school located in a poor, rural area in the Alabama Black Belt possessed the criteria and hallmarks of being a high-poverty, high-minority, high-achieving (HPMA) school. To address this purpose, the following research question was formed: How does a high-minority, high-poverty school in the Rural Black Belt of Alabama garner high student achievement? Chapter Five will address this question through a summary of the study, the findings, conclusions, implications, and future research suggestions.

Summary of the Study

Most HPMA schools found in other studies are primarily in elementary and middle schools. Therefore, there are very few examples of HPMA high schools that have been studied and recorded. To add to the body of literature, I performed interviews with ten people from two specific groups associated with Lynnewood High School. The two groups were the School Leadership Team (SLT) and the Recent Graduate Group (RGG). The interviews were conducted over a four-week timespan at Lynnewood High School, before the school's graduation ceremony, at another local school in the district, and via videophone applications. The interviews were recorded using a recording application on a cellular device. All participants seemed to be in favorable moods and forthcoming at the times of the interviews. The interview recordings were transferred to Express Scribe transcription software on a laptop. After the transcriptions were completed, they were evaluated using Atlas.ti coding software for reoccurring themes. It was from those themes, along with other preexisting data retrieved from the Alabama Department of Education website, that I formed conclusions about the presence of a previously unidentified HPMA school.

Conclusion

To address the research question, it was first important to explain why and how Lynnewood High School was a high-minority, high-poverty school. The four years of data mentioned in this chapter show that 100% of Lynnewood's student body is consistently made up of an African American population making it a high-minority school. According to the same data source, and considering the requirements to be labeled a National Blue Ribbon School, a Torchbearer School, and a 90-90-90 school, Lynnewood meets the criteria as a high-poverty school.

After justifying why Lynnewood was high-minority and high-poverty, it was then important to explain why and how it could be labeled high-achieving. In simple terms, because other studies used graduation percentages to determine high-achievement status, Lynnewood's trending graduation percentages were why it was labeled high-achieving school. Lynnewood may not have been a candidate to be a National Blue Ribbon School and despite being on the Alabama Failing Schools List at the time of this study, it did meet the academic criteria to be a Torchbearer School, and although it may not be a 90-90-90 school, it is a MPMA school. This was made evident from the data and the responses of the study participants on how Lynnewood became a high-achieving school.

It was concluded that the school had a couple of barriers that worked against student academic achievement that were both external and internal. The barriers included the lack of parental involvement, the need for students to go to work, the lack of value in education, leadership turnover, school consolidations, white flight, gangs, high teacher turnover, the acquisition of Teach for America teachers, the need for stronger school-community relationships, negative perceptions of the school, student living conditions, local school funding, and poverty.

As in other HPMA studies, the participants for this study identified many of the same negative influences on student academic achievement.

Despite the presence of negative influences, there were a plethora of positive influences, both internal and external, that were identified as aides to student academic achievement. Instead of listing all the positive influences identified and credited with the high academic achievement represented by the high graduation percentages, it is simpler to acknowledge that both positive internal and positive external influences were present in all the master themes identified on *Table 10* with the aforementioned negative influences. The master themes for which there were many sub-themes credited with the increased graduation percentages or academic achievement were Academics, Administration, Exterior Influences, Interior Influences, Relationships, School Operations, and Teachers.

Table 3, the literary summary model I developed specifically from the findings throughout the literature on page 69, possessed nine internal and three external characteristics that aided and hindered the development of other HPMA schools. After assessing the themes that were found as a result of the interviews, this case study confirms the outline of that model. In some form all 12 of the characteristics were acknowledged by the study participants.

Implications

An examination of the findings provide proof that it is possible for a high-poverty, high-minority high school in the rural, poor Black Belt Region of Alabama to garner graduation percentages at or above the state average. As a result of this research study, there are two things that must be considered in the years to come. First is the Alabama Failing Schools List and the second is the failure to look at rural schools as places of academic gains worthy of awards or recognition.

Lynnewood High School is currently on the Alabama Failing Schools List despite having a graduation percentage at or above the state average. For a school to be placed on this list, the school must be in the collective bottom 6% of all schools without prejudice if they are an elementary, middle, or high schools in Alabama. For high schools, their placement on the list is solely dictated by all high school juniors' performance on a single standardized test. In recent years, the American College Test, also known as the ACT, was the standardized test used to determine school success or failure even though it has been argued that it was not culturally sensitive to minorities. Recently, the state legislature decided to change the determining standardized test for high school students in the coming years. Yet, it is understandably unfair to judge a school's placement on the list solely on the results from one test. This is because the correlation between pronouncing a school as failing and it possessing exceptional graduation percentages is not reasonable. The state legislature and the Alabama Department of Education should consider other educational aspects for placement on the list or do away with the list all together.

Furthermore, educational entities such as the National Blue Ribbon School and the Torchbearer School Programs need to look at rural school districts to award academic gains although their academic gains may not be as flashy as those observed in larger school districts. Larger schools and school districts generally have more education funding and more students. More funding means schools can obtain the material and professional development needed to improve educational gains. Also, more students in schools means that it is easier to maintain higher academic percentages. For example, if a school has 100 seniors and 20 did not graduate, that school will have an 80% graduation percentage. Adversely, if a school has 300 seniors and 20 did not graduate, that school would have a 93% graduation percentage. So, when a single

student fails to graduate in a smaller school, it has a greater impact on the perceived success or failure of a school. This is not fair to those smaller schools that make remarkable strides to increasing academic achievement and closing the achievement gap between whites and minorities.

Many schools with similar minority and poverty levels should be encourage by my findings. There are a variety of obstacles that prevent academic achievement, and the majority of them can be conquered with placing emphases on academics, school administration, exterior and interior influences on students, relationships, school operations, and teachers. It is important to note that some of these characteristics may already be present in other schools that are on their way to academic excellence, and others may not be applicable to the culture and climate of every school. It may be necessary to conduct a school-level inventory on what is needed, produce an action plan to implement changes, and obtain buy in from all stakeholders.

Lastly, school and district leaders of schools placed on the Alabama Failing Schools List should not mull over this label. Lynnewood too was on this list, yet it meets the requirements to be a Torchbearer School. The legislature's Alabama Accountability Act of 2013, has mandated that the ALSDE place the bottom six percent of all Alabama schools on this list based on a single administration of a racially biased standardized test at certain grade levels annually. For high schools, it is given during every students' tenth grade year and is not administered again to each cohort. This is but a means to crush or mute the successes of HPMA schools – a means to crush the counter-narrative that gives minorities a voice of their reality.

Recommendations for Future Research

This case study observed how a single school in the Alabama Black Belt managed to become a HPMA school, but there are still gaps and other concerns that warrant future research considerations.

1. What are the teachers' perceptions of academic achievement at Lynnewood High School?
2. An exceptional graduation percentage is a challenge for any school to maintain every year. The continued education, entry into workforce, and/or unemployment of Lynnewood's students is worthy of further research to gage the effectiveness of the school's student preparation.
3. With the exception of Montgomery County which has a substantial tax base unlike the other poorer Black Belt counties, research needs to expand in the remaining sixteen Black Belt counties of Alabama to find and study other potential HPMA schools with graduation percentages at or above the state average.
4. Are there any HPMA schools high school outside of the Black Belt with graduation percentages at or above the state average? How do they manage to facilitate and maintain academic success?
5. How does the high teacher turnover at Lynnewood High School affect student achievement, veteran teachers' performances, and the administrative team?
6. With high teacher turnover, Lynnewood often employs Teach for America teachers to teach math and science. How do TFA teachers at Lynnewood and other schools like it perceive or view educating high-poverty, high-minority groups of students in the Alabama Black Belt?

7. What are the academic and social impacts of placing a HPMA school on the Alabama Failing Schools List?

Concluding Remarks

In was the goal of this study to find out how it was possible for a HPMA school to blossom out of the Black Belt Region of Alabama. With Lynnewood High School's HMPA status justified, there are lingering concerns. My primary concern is the lack of acknowledgement of its success and presence. I argue that the Alabama Department of Education, which possesses a storied history in educational inequality, along with the United States Department of Education, which is governed by few people from the education field, still harbor many unfavorable features from past educational laws and customs. Most educational teachings, funding, and advancements are geared for the success and perpetual rule of whites. School history books, along with the overall curricula formulated for all students to learn, are white-washed and mostly void of the contributions African Americans have made to the social, economic, and educational advancement of all Americans.

In the rural areas of Alabama, such as the one where Lynnewood resides, the tax base and political clout to make significant changes in the local education systems is lacking. Knowing that many affluent suburban school districts are flourishing, I believe educational state funding should be reallocated to bolster educational gains in poor school districts. Yet, one may argue that if Lynnewood could manage to become a HPMA school with relatively little funding then there is no need to reallocate state education funds to those areas. On the other hand, if those funds were reallocated to schools like Lynnewood and their school districts, it would be easier to obtain the same or similar educational material used by the affluent schools to increase student

academic gains. This liberal approach to education undoubtedly has an uphill battle in the highly conservative state of Alabama.

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Appendix A

Interview Protocols

School Leadership Team Protocol

1. Tell me about yourself.
2. And if you haven't mentioned it already, tell me about your job title, responsibilities, and/or role in the school.
3. Tell me about your school year?
4. Tell me about your schooling, teaching, and/or any other educational experiences you have had in the district.
5. Tell me about the school's culture and climate in terms of school safety as well as in terms of both good and bad relationships among everyone on campus.
6. Tell me about any school-lead programs that may have helped students succeed academically in the past three to four years.
7. Tell me about the teachers in terms of teacher student relationships and instructional qualities.
8. What do you perceive as the overall strengths and weaknesses of the teachers?
9. Tell me about the administrative team. (collaboration, instructional leadership qualities, time given to the school)
10. What do you perceive as the overall strengths and weaknesses of the administration team?
11. Tell me what is it like working with both the teachers and administrative team?
12. Tell me about your students' academic progress over the past two years.
13. What do you believe contributes to the academic success of your students?

14. What is the relationship like between the school and the parents of the students?
15. Tell me about the exterior barriers that work against student achievement.
16. What are some interior barriers or issues that work against student achievement?
17. What has been done to overcome the effects of the barriers?

Recent Student Graduate Protocol

1. Tell me about yourself.
2. Tell me about your time as a student at the school.
3. What grades did you typically earn?
4. Tell me about any extra-curricular activities in which you were a participant.
5. Tell me about any school-lead programs that may have helped you succeed academically.
6. What do you believe contributed to the academic success of you and other classmates?
7. Tell me about the school's culture and climate in terms of school safety as well as in terms of both good and bad relationships among everyone on campus.
8. Tell me about the teachers in terms of teacher student relationships and instructional qualities.
9. What do you perceive as the overall strengths and weaknesses of the teachers?
10. Tell me about the administrative team in terms of collaborating with others, instructional leadership qualities, and time given to the school after 3pm.
11. What do you perceive as the overall strengths and weaknesses of the administration team?
12. What was the relationship like between the school and your parents or your classmates' parents?
13. Tell me about the exterior barriers that work against student achievement.

14. What are some interior barriers or issues that work against student achievement?

15. What has been done to overcome the effects of the barriers?

Appendix B

Internal Review Board Consent Document

Auburn University

Auburn University, Alabama 36849-5221

Educational Foundations
Leadership and Technology
4036 Haley Center

Telephone: (334) 844-4460
Fax: (334) 844-3072

(NOTE: DO NOT SIGN THIS DOCUMENT UNLESS AN IRB APPROVAL STAMP WITH CURRENT DATES HAS BEEN APPLIED TO THIS DOCUMENT.)

INFORMED CONSENT
For a research study entitled
"Finding High Achievement in the Alabama Black Belt"

You are invited to participate in a research study to identify how a high school in rural Alabama built an environment that possessed the characteristics of being a high-poverty, high-minority, high-achieving school. The study is being conducted by Christopher N. Wooten, a Ph.D. candidate, under the direction of Dr. Ivan Watts, associate professor in the Auburn University Department of Educational Foundations, Leadership, and Technology. You were selected as a possible participant because of your experiences at Greensboro High School and because you are age 19 or older.

What will be involved if you participate? If you decide to participate in this research study, you will be asked to participate in an interview and a follow-up meeting to verify the interpretation of the interview. Your total time commitment will be approximately two (2) to three (3) hours.

Are there any risks or discomforts? The interview for this study will be recorded with audio recording devices for transcribing interview questions and responses. The risks associated with participating in this study are the release of your name as a participant in the study and the release of your interview response. To minimize these risks, I will use a pseudonym in place of your actual name in the transcripts and the audio recording of the interview will be permanently deleted at the conclusion of my dissertation process. No specific student grades, transcripts, or discipline reports are needed for this study.

Are there any benefits to yourself or others? If you participate in this study, you can expect no monetary or nonmonetary benefits to yourself, other participants, or the school. I cannot promise you that you will receive any benefits.

Will you receive compensation for participating? To thank you for your time you will be offered a copy of your interview transcript as well as an overview of the research results.

Participant's initials _____ Page 1 of 2

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Are there any costs? If you decide to participate, you will incur no financial obligations on your behalf.

If you change your mind about participating, you can withdraw at any time during the study. Your participation is completely voluntary. If you choose to withdraw, your data can be withdrawn as long as it is identifiable. Your decision about whether or not to participate or to stop participating will not jeopardize your future relations with Auburn University, the Department of Educational Foundations, Leadership, and Technology or myself.

Your privacy will be protected. Any information obtained in connection with this study will remain confidential. Information obtained through your participation may be used to fulfill an educational requirement, to publish, to use in professional meetings, or to supplement future research efforts.

If you have questions about this study, please ask them now or contact Christopher Wooten at cnw0004@auburn.edu or Ivan Watts at wattsie@auburn.edu. A copy of this document will be given to you to keep.

If you have questions about your rights as a research participant, you may contact the Auburn University Office of Research Compliance or the Institutional Review Board by phone (334)-844-5966 or e-mail at IRBadmin@auburn.edu or IRBChair@auburn.edu.

HAVING READ THE INFORMATION PROVIDED, YOU MUST DECIDE WHETHER OR NOT YOU WISH TO PARTICIPATE IN THIS RESEARCH STUDY. YOUR SIGNATURE INDICATES YOUR WILLINGNESS TO PARTICIPATE.

Participant's Signature	**Date**	**Investigator Obtaining Consent**	**Date**
Printed Name		**Printed Name**	

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Protocol # 18-153 EP 1805

Appendix C

Case Study/HPMA Codebook

Code
Acknowledging Sucess
Administration Strengths
Administrative Weaknesses
Building Relationships On Campus
Building Relationships with Community
Collaboration on Campus
Daily Operations (Non-Academic)
Exterior Barriers
High Expectations
Incresing Academic Performance
Interior Barriers
Leadership Quality
Overcoming Exterior Barriers
Overcoming Interior Barriers
Parental Involvement
Post High School Track
Professional Development
School Academic Programs
School Programs (Non-academic)
School Safety
Student Development
Student Discipline
Student Perception of School
Teacher Quality
Teacher Retention
Teacher Strengths
Teacher Student Relationships
Teacher Weaknesses

Appendix D

Audit Trail

May 11, 2018
I received approval to start my dissertation interviews. Interview protocols and informed consent documents were printed and organized in a portable filing folder. I sent the five members of the school leadership team an email formally asking them to participate in my research effort. The email also included a link to the Doodle scheduling website where I set up times for participants to sign up. I have already received confirmation from the principal. I also sent participation invitations to eleven former students through the Facebook social networking website. The former students graduated from the high school between 2014 and 2017. It is my hope to interview four or five of these participants and have all interviews completed by May 30th.

May 15, 2018
I had my first interview today with the principal of the school. The interview started around 11:15 and finished an hour later.

May 16, 2018
I had an interview with the school counselor today after school. The interview started around 3:45 and finished thirty minutes later. I received correspondence from a potential former student participant this morning. I am hoping to schedule an interview with him in the coming days.

May 17, 2018
I secured an interview with my first former student. Instead of scheduling the interview at a future date, he told me that he was available to meet me at my school. He showed up a couple of minutes later. The interview was conducted in my classroom and started around 3:25 PM.

May 18, 2018
The second former student was secured for an interview today. Like the first former student, she came to my classroom for the interview after school. The interview started around 3:30 PM. I also had correspondence with the school's assistant principal to secure an interview, but I was unsuccessful.

May 21, 2018
I received correspondence from a third former student via the Facebook social networking website. We discussed having the interview and ultimately decided to have it via the Facetime videophone application. We decided to utilize Facetime because he has an internship in a city over 150 miles away. I emailed the informed consent. He signed it, and sent me pictures of the document. I printed, signed, and filed it. I told him of his rights as a research participant when we connected on Facetime. The interview started around 8:45 PM and lasted about 10 minutes.

Realizing the school had graduation the next day on May 22, I called my dissertation chairperson, Dr. Watts. I asked him if it would be acceptable to secure and perform interviews at the graduation. He told me that that would be fine.

May 22, 2018
I received correspondence from the 2016 class valedictorian. Because he was busy, we scheduled an interview for the next day.

The graduation was scheduled to start at 6 PM. Knowing that there was going to be a large crowd, I arrived over an hour early with my informed consent forms. As the attendees began to file into the bleachers, I secured a 2016 graduate for an interview. She was my fourth former student graduate. I notified her of her rights for participation and provided her with an informed consent form to sign. The interview lasted about eight minutes, then a fifth former student participant was immediately secured for an interview as well. She was provided with an informed consent form and notified of her rights to participate. That interview lasted seven minutes.

May 23, 2018
The class valedictorian came to my classroom for his interview with me around 2PM. He was the sixth former student participant, and even though I already met my quota for my research, I valued his opinion. So, I gave him an informed consent form to sign, and I commenced with the interview. The interview lasted about thirteen minutes.

May 24, 2018
I contacted the last three school leadership team members to schedule interviews. The assistant principal said that we could schedule for next week. The other two members agreed to do Facetime interviews on Monday.

May 30, 2018
Two days ago the assistant principal sent me an email telling me that he would be in his office on May 30th from 8 AM until noon. I replied that I would be there around 10 AM. When I arrived at the school, I pulled up to the door closest to his office. When I entered his office, he had a former coach in there. After the coach left, I provided him with a copy of the informed consent to initial and sign. I explained it and informed him of his rights as a participant. The interview lasted a little over 20 minutes.

June 5, 2018
I texted Dr. Watts to inquire about having a meeting with him while I was in Auburn working summer camps. He replied that we could meet on Thursday, June 7th. We agreed to meet around 11 AM.

June 7, 2018
Had a Facetime meeting with Dr. Watts tonight to make sure I was on track and to make sure that we were in agreeance on my dissertation progress. We discussed the nine interviews I already conducted, the two interviews I had left to conduct, transcribing those interviews as a summer project, beginning to write chapter four of the dissertation, and the first draft of my dissertation consisting of all five chapters.

June 8, 2018
After the closing ceremony for the summer camp I worked this week, I went around to my committee members' offices to get them to resign my general oral exam form. I managed to get two signatures and one of which was from my former dissertation committee chairperson, Dr. Kensler. As she continued her lunch, we discussed the progress of my dissertation and the possible need for at least four total hours of recorded interviews. We also discussed my current job situation. Whereas Dr. Watts believes that I should shoot for completing just my transcriptions this summer, Dr. Kensler told me that she advises would advise her students to have all five chapters completed prior to the semester that they want to graduate. Respectfully, she did differ to Dr. Watts and his process. But, I think that getting all chapters completed by the end of the summer is feasible, and my aim is to do just that.

June 10, 2018
I performed a phone interview with the school's Student Achievement Specialist.

June 12, 2018
Finished transcribing my first and longest interview with Dr. Brown. General Oral Exam Form was signed and completed by all committee members.

June 19, 2018
Finished transcribing the counselor's interview.

June 21, 2018
Finished transcribing the Student Achievement Specialist's interview.

June 22, 2018
Finished transcribing the assistant principal's interview. That's all the school leadership team's interviews with the exception of the instructional coach. I have yet to interview her.

June 24, 2018
Finished transcribing the first student's interview.

June 25, 2018
Finished transcribing the second student's interview.

June 26, 2018
Called the last member of the school's "mini leadership team" today. She answered, but gave another excuse. She told me that she would call me back. This was my last attempt. Finished transcribing the third student's interview.

June 27, 2018
Finished transcribing the fourth student's interview.

June 28, 2018
Finished transcribing the last two student interviews today, and I delivered my list of pseudonym decoder list in a sealed envelope to the administrative assistant in the main office on the EFLT

floor. I notified Ms. Young that Dr. Watts would be there to pick it up on his next visit to campus. I also encrypted my "Decode List" on my laptop with a password different from the one I use to log on to the laptop itself.

July 3, 2018
I started coding my first interview, and I found myself stopping half-way through to re-read about coding.

July 16, 2018
Completed the first coding all four transcripts from the school leadership team.

July 19, 2018
Completed the initials coding of all ten interview transcripts.

July 20, 2018
I spent the day searching for and downloading all of the files I needed pertaining to the following: graduation and dropout rates, enrollment, district funding, free or reduced lunch rates, and Alabama Failing Schools Lists. All seventeen documents that were retrieved ranged from the 2014-2015 to the 2017-2018 school year. Due to how recent the 2017-2018 graduations were, the state website had not uploaded the said school year's graduation and dropout rates. Because I am only concerned with the information from Lynnewood High School, I sent an email to the principal and the counselor today requesting the graduation and dropout data from the 2017-2018 graduation class. Before the end of the day, the counselor emailed me back. She told me that when she signed into the state portal, the official data that I was requesting was also not posted yet. It is not detrimental to this research, but it would be helpful in the argument that high achievement, which is determined by the graduation data, was continued during the 2017-2018 school year. The 2017-2018 school year was not one of the years focused on for this dissertation but will be mentioned.

Today I also started to review book texts on data analysis and formulating the last two chapters of the dissertation. Of particular concern to me was the thirty-one codes that were presently identified after completing the initial coding process. I felt this was too many until I found the following in the Merriam (1988) text:

> The number of categories one constructs depends on the data and the focus of the research. In any case, the number should be manageable…. The fewer the categories, the greater level of abstraction. A large number of categories is likely to reflect an analysis based on concrete description. (p. 135)

July 22, 2018
I emailed the school district's certification officer in an effort to acquire data pertaining to the annual attendance data for the school and the per pupil expenditures for each of the four school years observed. There was no sufficient data available.

August 12, 2018
Chapter 3, my methods section, was completed and emailed to my committee methodologist for review. While awaiting her feedback, I continued formulating and outlining Chapters 4 and 5.

August 22, 2018
I corresponded with my chairperson about Chapters 1, 2, and 3. There are more corrections he wanted me to make to the first two chapters.

September 2, 2018
I submitted Chapters 4 and 5 to my chairperson for critique

September 8, 2018
My committee methodologist returned Chapter 3 to me with corrections and suggestions – a lot of suggestions…

October 9, 2018
Re-submitted Chapters 4 and 5 to chairperson for critique and corrections.

October 14, 2018
With approval from my chairperson, I submitted Chapters 1-5 to my entire committee for critique and feedback. This version included all the corrections suggested by my committee to date.

October 22, 2018
First draft of dissertation was submitted to graduate school.

October 25, 2018
Dissertation sent to outside reader.

October 31, 2018
Final Oral Defense scheduled for November 14th.

November 14, 2018
I defended my dissertation today before my committee. After my oral presentation, my committee gave me many things to think about and add to my written dissertation. Most of which was the infusion of my selected theoretical framework, the Critical Race Theory. At times the defense was intense and yet refreshing – refreshing to hear the white committee members push me harder to infuse more principles and tenants of CRT. Although, I was called Dr. Christopher Wooten for the first time today, I see that this journey continues.