THE IMPACT AND EFFECT OF A SCHOOL-BASED
MENTORING PROGRAM ON STUDENTS AT-RISK
IN THE VIRTUAL LEARNING ENVIRONMENT
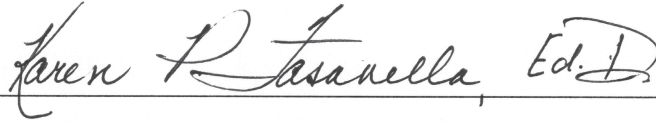OF AN URBAN SCHOOL DISTRICT

by

David Jefferson, Jr.

A DISSERTATION

Presented to the Educational Leadership Program of the
Saint Elizabeth University in partial fulfillment of
the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Education

MAY 2022

The Dissertation, by David Jefferson,

for the degree of Doctor of Education,

is approved.
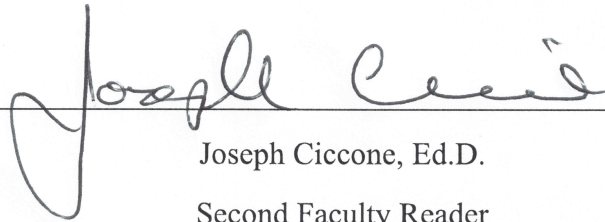
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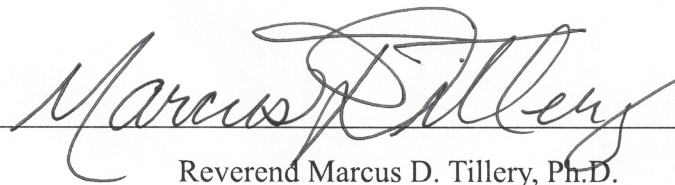Program Chair

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ABSTRACT

An abstract of the dissertation of David Jefferson, Jr. for the degree of Doctor of Education in the

Educational Leadership Program presented May 2022.

Title: The impact and effect of a school-based mentoring program on students at-risk

(in the virtual learning environment of an urban school district)

The academic achievement gap, particularly for at-risk students in urban school districts, needs

to be addressed and met head on with a plan. That plan is identified as a school- based

mentoring program. The purpose of this research study is to examine the impact and effect a

school based mentoring curriculum has on at-risk students in an urban school district during a

virtual learning environment. The findings of this study will analyze the impact of a school-based

mentoring program and its effect on academic and social performance for the student engaged

and participating. This plan and curriculum offers alternative support to teachers in the academic

setting, therefore, assisting them in the support of student success. It is anticipated that through

ongoing mentoring, there can be a change in student attendance, increased academic

performance, increased levels of self efficacy, decreased acts of risky and truant behaviors along

with decreasing suspension. Finally, this study aims to monitor student confidence, increased

student academic skills, increased student civic awareness, and increased student/teacher

interaction and overall performance. The study concludes with implications and limitations of the

study, along with recommendations for future research of school-based mentoring programs.

DEDICATION

First, I would like to give honor to God, my creator, sustainer and Heavenly Father. I also want to acknowledge my Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To God be the glory for the great things He has done!

To my wife Joni. Thank you for challenging me. Thank you for understanding the time and commitment I needed to achieve my goal and objective.

To our beautiful children, Naiya, David and Ryann :

Naiya, you're our oldest and you make us so proud. You're a leader and your future is extremely bright. Stay the course and you will achieve all your goals and objectives.

David, you are a creator and designer. You're my namesake and you're an amazing young man. I can not wait until you earn your doctorate.

Ryann, your one of the hardest working individuals I know and your only 13! You're talented, hardworking and sweet as potato pie.

I love you all! You guys have grown so fast and as time moves on you can be confident in your future.

Mom, your my inspiration and your my Shero! Thank you for giving me life. For all the years of believing in me and encouraging me. You have never left me nor forsaken me. Your patience in grooming me has paid off! I am so blessed to call you mother! I love you so much! I got this!

Dad, my hero! You are an amazing father and example. Truth be told you marked me in the ways of acquiring knowledge years ago. Your journey in education has alway's inspired me. Now I hope you can see the sacrifice you made has paid off. I am honored and humbled to walk in your shoes and to be your namesake. I love you dad! To my sisters Kimberly, Lou Ella and

Jasmine. You're my best friends and my constant supporters. I am so proud to be your brother. I have a special bond with each of you and you know I couldn't have done this without your prayers, love and support, thank you!

Remembering my beloved lineage, Grandpa Mouton, Grandma Mouton, Grandpa Jefferson and Grandma Jefferson. I know you're in the balcony of heaven celebrating this great achievement with me. Thank you for all you have done and I miss you dearly.

To my mother and father in-law, Emma and Jack Bird Jr. Thank you for all your support and encouragement. I appreciate all you have done for my family and I.

To my brothers in-law, John, Ronald and Jack III. To my sister in-law Tia. We have shared some amazing times together. I share this moment with you!

To my nephew's, John David, Joshua, Justin, Ronald, Jashaun, Michael and my niece's Linda, Sydney and Brooklyn. I love you so much.

To my best friend's Renzo Curis, Virgil Maupin, Jason Cooper, Paul White and Vito Scavo.

To Oliver "Power" Grant, your my big brother and I thank you for all you have done for me. Thank you for being present and supportive for me always. We are friends for life.

To Benedict Guerrier. There is no one like you. You saved me when I couldn't save myself you are a true example of my brother from another mother. You're an inspiration and we have only just begun our journey. Can't wait to see what's next in our lives.

To Dan Clarke my friend and colleague. You're up next! Thank you for the countless conversations and meetings to discuss our plans and next steps. You have always been a great friend to me and I'm so happy to have met you along this journey.

To my brother and friend Dr. Marcus Tillery! You have done so much for me in this effort. Your wisdom and guidance has helped me from our Princeton days to now. Thank you for being a stronghold in my journey. RQQ. To my brothers, Richard Wyatt, Ali Salaam, Terrance Onyiuke and my Omega Psi Phi fraternity incorporated family, "Mightly OX" line brothers, Lamont, Kenny, Doug, Mike, Ed and Aaron. I appreciate and thank God for you all. Long live the 7 Sons! Wishing all of my friends in my Irvington Cohort C13 all the best as we move forward in life. It has been a pleasure meeting and learning alongside you all.

To my mentor and colleague Dr. Billie Bailey, you're such an amazing encourager and supporter. Thank you for being in my corner with a smile and wisdom. It is a pleasure working with you and helping shape the lives of young people.

To Dr. Lamont Repollet my brother and friend. You have shown me what leadership is all about. I have learned so much from you in a short period of time. I will continue to look at the model you have molded and work to continue in the legacy you have created. Thank you ever so much!

To Dr. Charles E. Booth, Rev. Jesse Jackson, Denzel Washington, Spike Lee, Percy Ellis Sutton, Rev. Al Sharpton, Dr. Joe Ratliff, Dr. Jerry Carter, Carl Banks, Congressman Donald Payne Sr & Jr, The Honorable Mayor Sharpe James, Senator Corey Booker, President Barack Obama, Mayor Raz Baraka, Dr. Leonard Jeffries, Metropolitan Family, CCEW Family, Barbara D. James, Dr. Cleophus LaRue, Craig Barnes, Carlos Lejnieks, Stephen Powell, Thomas Owens, Sean Dove, Najee Corum and my PASSPORT family at Kean University, Viviana Zambrano, Tina Reilly and Jocelyn Small.

To everyone and anyone I may have over looked thank you!

TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF TABLES

Chapter I

Introduction

Statistics have shown that there is an existing and persistent achievement gap both academically and socially for At-Risk (AR) students (O'Hanlon, 2009). This is true for AR students all around the world, not only here domestically. The issue is so great that both federal and state laws have been passed to ensure support is given to the young men and women who suffer as a result of their socio-economic standing and encounter obstacles beyond their control that impact their ability to reach their potential. School districts play a major role in providing assistance to AR students. Their ability to ensure the success of every student should be paramount. In addition, school districts can engage outside support for the AR student (Sanders & McQuillin, 2019). The parameters of what defines an AR student may vary. For the purpose of this study, AR students are students having issues with attendance, poor or low academic achievement, numerous behavioral referrals, and lack of social and emotional aptitude. They tend to struggle academically, emotionally, physically, financially, and socially. So how can we improve their outcomes? This study will investigate the value of a school-based mentoring/ leadership program as a vehicle to decreasing or closing the achievement gap for AR students.

Mentoring and leadership programs can assist in reducing or removing the barriers leading to the issues AR students face (Bayer & DuBois, 2015). There are currently numerous nonprofit and public agencies working to improve outcomes for at-risk students through mentorship programs, such as Big Brothers and Big Sisters, The Boy's and Girl's Club, and the United Way. Additionally, organized philanthropy has been at the forefront of these efforts, notably in defining key indicators; discovering and disseminating actionable knowledge to key

nonprofit, private, and public partners and stakeholders; and creating a robust infrastructure for convening and funding impactful programs and organizations (Lyons & McQuillin, 2019). This has benefitted the learning and development of students in these programs.

Background and Context

Students learn in different ways (Randolph & Johnson, 2008). Furthermore, students learn best in ways that are unique to their learning style and needs. Teachers have a short amount of time to teach a lesson to students who learn differently and, even with the best of intentions, may not be able to dedicate as much time to each individual student's needs as they would like (Laco & Johnson, 2019). As a result students suffer, and some then become AR academically. However, the problem does not stop at academics. Attendance ultimately declines from the lack of engagement with the subject matter, leading the student to fall behind in two key areas, attendance and academics. This coupled with lack of support from home makes for a challenging environment to succeed (Weiss et al., 2019). The AR students who do attend school show poor behavior. Some believe this behavior is a cry for attention that they may not receive at home. If AR students are not receiving the attention they need at home, they are not having their emotional needs met from adults in their lives (Cavell et al., 2009). This leads to making poor choices, which leads to detrimental consequences that can not be reversed, such as suspension and behavioral episodes . Ultimately, students fall further behind, making it harder to make up the material that may have been missed previously. This leads to a downward spiral, which can affect others, not just the AR student. Poor and unruly behavior is a blockage to other students' learning and generally leads to dismissal from the classroom. The time missed due to behavior is just another impact of being AR.

2

A school-based mentoring curriculum is a plausible solution to this issue. School-based mentoring places leaders from the community into the role of providing support and assistance to AR students (Bayer & Dubois, 2015). Mentors and mentor programs provide positive support for not only academic achievement but also development of a moral code by which a young person should abide. Mentors who invest time in the lives of young people build a bond that works to the benefit of not only the mentee, but the mentor as well.

Local Context

Hillside High School, located in northern New Jersey, is a comprehensive community four-year public high school. Hillside High School serves students in ninth through twelfth grades from Hillside in Union County, New Jersey, operating as the only secondary school of the Hillside Public Schools. The school has been accredited by the Middle States Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Secondary Schools. In 2018, the school had an enrollment of 843 students and 77 classroom teachers, for a student-teacher ratio of 10:9. More than 400 students were eligible for free lunch, and 82 students were eligible for reduced cost lunch. According to the National Center for Education Statistics (2019), the majority of the students counted in this source are considered minorities. African American and Hispanic students make up more than 90% of the student population in Hillside, New Jersey (New Jersey Department of Education, 2019). The average household income in the Hillside school district is $84,074, and the median household income is $71,102. Hillside also has 2,078 people living below the poverty level. Only 7.7% of Hillside residents hold a Bachelors Degree or higher, while the majority of residents (66%) have completed high school and some college.

The district has one superintendent, one business administrator, one director of curriculum and instruction, one human resources director, six school principals, seven school vice principals, and three department supervisors.

School-Based Mentoring

Mentoring programs are built on recognition that the most valuable entity is the student, whose improved achievement is where all education reform efforts should focus (O'Hanon, 2009). This aligns with the broader education reform plan to address the socio-economic challenges that exist specifically for the target demographic. There has been a significant lapse in the aspiration toward higher education, sustainable careers, and participation in civic, community, and public service. One key point of the mentoring program's broader education reform plan is to prepare all students to meet the demands of a rapidly changing knowledge-based economy. Hillside High School has a large population of at-risk students. The Ready Set Grow Academy is recognized as a Social Emotional Learning (SEL), School Based Mentoring (SBM) intervention offering alternative support to teachers in the academic setting, therefore assisting in the cultivation of students with major potential.

My preliminary research comes from my actual application and integration of the Ready Set Grow Academy (RSGA) curriculum in the Hillside School District. To date, RSGA has serviced hundreds of students in Hillside schools. A school district's retention percentage of at-risk students is crucial for the students academic and sustainable growth. The school-based mentoring curriculum helps these at-risk students remain in school, improve their academic outcomes, and decrease their behavior and attendance violations. School-based mentoring programs assist students in a sustainable future through attaining social emotional skills and

aspiring to higher education. When assessed academically, students who matriculate through the RSGA program maintain their retention in the program with genuine effort. The primary partnership of the mentor program is the partnership between our "most valued partners": the students, parents and teachers served. With the leadership of the district superintendent, director of curriculum and instruction, and the school principal along with key staff, a level of credibility has been established for the program within the school district.

The Researcher

Though I am a graduate of Morehouse College and Princeton Theological Seminary, early on in my academic journey I was identified as an at-risk student. During my matriculation as a student in my adolescent years I struggled with academic achievement. With the assistance of several key mentors and help from my parents, I was able to succeed. This piqued my interest in putting together a tangible plan to address this problem in relation to at-risk students. In an effort to combat the achievement gap for at-risk students, I created the Ready Set Grow Academy. The academy aims to help at-risk (at-promise) students reach their full potential. The program addresses several different areas pertaining to the at-risk student. My goal is to provide students with basic academic knowledge and the skills necessary for rigorous undergraduate study and entry into graduate and professional schools along with career advancement. This entails providing students with a liberal education, understanding of self, knowledge of past and present societies, and preparation for the future and leadership roles. All of these topics are incorporated into a year-long curriculum. More than an advocate, I was able to launch the academy in Hillside, New Jersey in the Hillside School District in the Fall of 2016.

Issue Statement and Purpose of the Study

In today's world, the at-risk student is often times underrepresented and not supported (Laco & Johnson, 2019). However, in-school mentoring/leadership programs are frequently overlooked as methods to assist and improve behavior issues and academic outcomes in the school system. There is little evidence to support that in-school mentoring/leadership programs improve student achievement (Kolar & McBride, 2011). The purpose of this study is to explore an in-school student leadership and mentoring program. There is little information on this topic and this study will fill the gap. This program aims to provide assistance to at-risk students who are not working up to their potential. This plan and curriculum offers alternative support to teachers in the academic setting, therefore assisting them in the support of students with major potential. It is anticipated that through ongoing mentoring, there can be a change in student attendance, increased academic performance, increased levels of self-efficacy, and decreased acts of risky and truant behaviors along with decreasing suspension (Laco & Johnson, 2019). This study aims to monitor an increase in student confidence, increased student academic skills, increased student civic awareness, and increased student/teacher interaction and overall performance (Crisp & Alvarado, 2018). This study will investigate whether ninth through twelfth grade at-risk (AR) students are impacted by a mentoring curriculum. The aim is to determine to what extent mentoring increases student attendance, improves academic achievement, and reduces the number of behavior issues and referrals.

Research Questions

1. What are the overall benefits for at risk students who are involved in a school based mentoring program?

2. What are the determining factors that make this program successful?

3. What areas of a student life improve or change significantly as a result of a school based mentoring program?

Rationale and Significance

The findings of this study will benefit AR students, school districts, the families they serve, and ultimately society as a whole, by showcasing that relationships between children and adults are paramount and have a major impact in the lives of the students we educate. However, we cannot sit idly by pretending that what we are doing to improve their outcomes is working. AR students are students who more than likely do not have supportive relationships with the adults or key figures in their lives. Engaging mentors as school leaders reveals the impact relationships with community leaders can have on improving the performance of AR students both academically and behaviorally. This study will help the researcher identify specific data to support how relationships can affect change in the classroom from one year to the next. The challenges faced by AR students will be met with mentoring, and the impact of mentoring in the lives of AR students will be demonstrated. These benefits are important because they lead to a decrease in the areas of challenge and the AR student label ultimately being replaced with SS, successful student (Smith & Stormont, 2011).

This study will contribute to the field and break ground on this particular subject because there is a data desert in relation to at-risk youth academic intervention. I plan to show this is a

broad problem area of education. This study ultimately aims to support the foundation of research in the area of AR students, in accordance with the law. The Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) was passed by the United States Congress and signed into law by President Lyndon B. Johnson in 1965. The Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) was passed in December of 2015, signed into law by President Barack Obama, and governs the United States K-12 public education policy. Under the ESEA, Title I was conceived in order to compensate for the considerable deprivation associated with child poverty. The funds are broken down into two types of assistance. The first is a "school wide program" in which schools can dispense resources in a flexible manner. The second is a "targeted assistance program" which allows schools to identify students who are failing or at risk of failing. These funds help to underwrite the financial stability of mentoring programs to ensure success (Rodgriguez-Rodriguez & Guzman, 2019). This study around AR students will be an additive to a topic of research that is hard to identify or does not exist. It will however show the driving statistics to support the implementation of school-based mentoring programs to provide a solution to the notable achievement gap for the AR student.

Research Approach

This study will use a mixed-methodology approach, utilizing qualitative and quantitative data. The quantitative methods are designed to reveal whether a mentoring program has a significant impact on AR students' academic improvement, behavioral referrals, and social emotional aptitude. The actual mentoring program began on May 1, 2016 and will end on June 24, 2021. This provides me with more than enough time to acquire and register substantial data to reach my results. We have scheduled for 2-3 hours a week per curriculum schedule. This is the

amount of mentoring time students will achieve. The pre-test identification occurred in the

Spring of 2019 and the post test will be Spring of 2021. The results will be reviewed alongside

the students' data to determine if the program shows improvement in student attendance,

academics, and discipline referrals.

Assumptions

Preceding this research and prior to 2016 there were not any specific school-based

mentoring programs at the Hillside High School. As a result, several assumptions were made

after providing professional development and keynote speaking within the school district.

First, it was assumed that at-risk students would be the responsibility of the vice principal

or another identified disciplinarian. This assumption did not prove to be fruitful for the student,

considering there was not a plan to improve their academic outcomes, only their behavioral

issues. Second, it was also assumed that there was no positive view or outcome for this cohort of

students. Third, it was assumed that teachers dealing with students struggling academically

would be able to make up their late assignments, or at least present a plan for overcoming the

academic challenges. Finally, the researcher assumed that the administration and teachers'

positive opinion of a school-based mentoring program would be beneficial for everyone

involved.

Summary

Students, now more than ever, are in need of positive adult role models to inspire and

encourage them as they navigate the educational landscape. Providing students with the basic

academic knowledge and skills necessary to ensure lifelong learning is key. The objective and

goal is to ensure students are prepared for undergraduate study, entry into graduate and

professional schools, and ultimately career advancement. This foundation will ensure students are prepared for leadership roles.

With a positive environment, professional growth is possible not only for at-risk students, but also for teachers and employees. The goals of this study are quite simple: find out the overall benefits for at-risk students who are involved in a school based mentoring program, find out the determining factors that make this program successful and the areas of student life that improve or change significantly as a result of a school based mentoring program. When students are viewed and identified as at-risk, a school-based mentoring curriculum can provide the assistance and support needed to empower students to overcome a lack of confidence and strengthen their work ethic and moral character.

Students are more likely to progress academically when they are set up with key positive relationships to ensure their success. This is my lifelong work, and I am committed to ensuring there are concrete outcomes to working with and mentoring at-risk youth. This study aims to determine the effectiveness of mentoring relationships for at-risk students in regards to improving their attendance, behavior, and academic outcomes for the course of one academic year.

Definitions of Key Terms

Accountability - "an obligation or willingness to accept responsibility or
to account for one's actions" (Merriam-Webster, 2015).

At-Risk – students who are academically performing one or more grade levels below their current grade placement. students who struggle academically and behaviorally and whose basic skills are deemed to be below grade-level standards.

CCSS – Common Core State Standards that consist of ELA and math skill expectations.

Collaboration - "to work with another person or group in order to achieve or do something" (Merriam-Webster, 2015).

ELA – English Language Arts. ELA consists of all reading and language educational standards.

Entity -"something that exists by itself" (Merriam-Webster, 2015).

Instructional Leader – a person within a school who serves as the leader or administrator and makes executive decisions on behalf of all constituents.

ISLLC Standards – Interstate School Leaders Licensure Consortium that outlines and defines specific standards that school leaders are accountable for upholding.

Mentor - an experienced and trusted advisor.

Moderately At-Risk – students who have a median average of two grade levels below current grade level in reading and Math according to the iReady test.

Professional Development - Training provided to teaching staff to support the vision and the initiatives of a school and school district so that they acquire the knowledge and skills needed to support their individual growth and the growth of the learning community. This includes work with an instructor in the classroom-like setting, consultation, coaching, lesson study, and opportunities for reflection.

Significantly At-Risk – students who have a median average of three or more grade levels below current grade level in reading and Math according to the iReady test.

School Partnerships – local community entities that join with schools to provide students with potential for learning by providing special services, support, and active engagement in students'

and school activities.

School Relations – communication between school and community.

Slightly At-Risk – students who have a median average of one grade level below current grade level in reading and math according to the iReady test.

Social Emotional Learning (SEL) - the process through which children and adults acquire and effectively apply the knowledge, attitudes, and skills necessary to understand and manage emotions, set and achieve positive goals, feel and show empathy for others, establish and maintain positive relationships, and make responsible decisions.

Stakeholders – anyone inside or outside of the education system who is involved with learning (e.g. parents, leaders, students, community members).

Chapter II

Literature Review

Chapter I presented an overview of the study to include the significance and purpose of the approach. However, in order to justify the study, it is necessary to position the methods and research questions into the context of the currently available body of knowledge. As it is the aim of this researcher to add to the body of knowledge, it was important to bring together the multiple themes that are relevant to the research questions and explore what is currently known in relation to the primary themes of the present study. As such, Chapter II presents the research available associated with the key themes of the historical issue of at-risk students, defining at-risk students, causes and effects of at-risk students, previous solutions attempted, school segregation, defunding urban schools, and school-based mentorship programs. This chapter will conclude with a summary of the findings of this literature review and will identify gaps in the current knowledge that will serve as a justification for the present study.

Historical Issue of At-risk Students

The term at-risk is used in various contexts in the education discipline as well as other areas of social inquiry. In the school system, the concept carries significant immediate and long-term implications that are deeply embedded in the social and economic disparities experienced by these populations. Kamenetz (2018) explained that these student groups were identified in 1983 as former President Ronald Reagan was informed that students were increasingly falling behind their international peers. From this awareness, campaigns to improve the mediocre education system led to the No Child Left Behind Act in 2002 (Kamenetz, 2018). However, these efforts have failed to meet the specific needs of at-risk students. As a result, students who are

already experiencing marginalization are further left behind academically. According to Pennie et al. (2016), these areas of marginalization maintain the socioeconomic disparities by failing to ensure the academic achievement of students in impoverished school districts as well as those who live in communities that are densely populated with minority populations. While Kamenetz (2018) pointed out that these groups have gradually improved their test scores over the last decade, the improvements are not consistent with those who are not considered at-risk. Kamenetz's (2018) work was significant to the current study as it aims to explain how education fits into the historical and political structures that inadvertently oppress marginalized individuals by hindering the accessibility of education to those who are at risk of failing to meet the academic standards that are necessary to contribute to these institutions.

The disparities are recognized most predominately among students of color. Pennie et al. (2016) noted that 7% of all students drop out of high school, with students of color representing the highest percentages of this data. These populations are also more likely to experience poverty and homelessness, which further places them at-risk for poor academic outcomes. According to Pennie et al. (2016), students who do not have a steady living arrangement are at a higher risk for dropping out of high school, leading to a cycle of poverty that stems from a lack of adequate education. These students are also more likely to become involved in the juvenile justice system, where only 9% are expected to graduate or earn their G.E.D. and only 2% are expected to pursue a higher education. In other words, once these students have begun to struggle with academics, their living conditions and demographics further magnify the likelihood and potential negative implications of dropping out of high school. Pennie et al. (2016) asserted that a failure to provide an adequate education ensures that these students will experience a lifetime of disparities in all

areas of their life. Interestingly, Pennie et al. (2016) placed at-risk students into the context of racial discrimination and the oppressive nature of social institutions despite the assertions that these factors do not hold in modern society.

Another issue associated with the social and political history of at-risk students is the number of undocumented immigrant students who are dependent on the public school system. According to Sulkowski (2017), these populations are marginalized "because of prevailing laws, policies, practices, and public perceptions harbored by dominant members of society" (p. 62). As their immigration status leaves the family with fewer resources, they may also experience the implications of poverty discussed by Pennie et al. (2016). However, what is most notable is that, without an adequate education, these students will not have the foundation to contribute to the political and social environments, quieting the voices of the entire population. Within this context, the laws and regulations that hinder the parental involvement continue to be expanded to further uphold these disparities. Sulkowski (2017) found that having an unauthorized status limited the parents' involvement and significantly affected the academic achievement levels of these students. Despite laws that ensure these students can receive a free public education, these disparities in achievement levels indicate the education is not equitable or comparable to the education received by students who are citizens. Notably, the laws that ensure these immigrant students are provided with a free education do not take into consideration the disproportionate number of these students who live at or below the poverty level with minimal social support.

As the disparities among minorities and immigrants can be placed into the historical context of oppressive policies, it is important to also include a discussion of the gender gap in education. According to Morgan et al., (2016), females are at a much higher risk for having low

scores in mathematics than their male counterparts. This assertion was further supported by

Amiripour et al. (2017), who conducted a statistical analysis of immigrants in Iran which

included gender as a key demographic. Referring to the likelihood for disparities as persistent

mathematics difficulties (PMD), Morgan et al. (2016) considered other factors including

socioeconomic status and race and still determined that males are at a lower risk for PMD than

females. Questions that were left unanswered, however, related to the level of attention female

students are given compared to their male counterparts in the delivery of mathematics materials.

To put this into the historical context, females earn a lower wage than males, maintaining the

structure of the patriarchal society (Blau & Kahn, 2017). Just as certain disparities have been

recognized relating to minorities and the poor, females are at a higher risk of poor academic

achievements due to the social structures and political environment. Although there is

momentum for closing the gender wage gap, inequities in education will ensure that the gap

remains a predominate driver of social disparities for females.

    The issues with maintaining this system, however, stretch throughout history and into the

future. According to Eastman (2016), dropping out of high school is often due to a low level of

academic achievement and low self-efficacy in the school environment. This decision does not

only affect the student but also the entire society. Although the social structures can be blamed

for these disparities, the truth remains that the society is increasingly dependent on individuals

who are able to attain their diploma and pursue STEM careers (Eastman, 2016). In previous

generations, Eastman (2016) explained, the goal was to have enough factory workers, which

encouraged certain populations to reduce their emphasis on academic achievements. However,

those trends have continued beyond what is socially productive. In other words, by maintaining a

system of disparities in education and leaving behind at-risk students, the social institutions are ensuring that society will not have an adequately educated generation to compete internationally.

Another issue with failing these at-risk students is that individuals who do not have a high school diploma are at a higher risk for many health and social issues (Lansford et al., 2016). In fact, high school dropouts are four times more likely to have negative outcomes such as being arrested or on government assistance. For marginalized populations, these numbers are even higher. This data informs us that failing to promote educational opportunities for these students will result in higher and long-term burdens on the economy. Whether the students are incarcerated or on government assistance, the society will carry the costs of their care long after what would have been their graduation day.

Throughout this section, the currently available data has been presented to place the issues associated with at-risk students into historical and political contexts. While more details associated with the definition of at-risk students will be explored in the following section, several notable themes have already emerged. Primarily, the education system has served to maintain the social structures of disparity, leaving marginalized students at a higher risk for dropping out or failing to meet the academic standards exceeded by their peers. As such, these populations are likely to maintain their status in society, whether it be associated with race, socioeconomic status, family composition, or gender. The issues associated with maintaining these statuses have been discussed in the context of both personal and societal implications. Finally, the emphasis on STEM education as a product of changes in society has been explored to include the social function of the public education system.

Defining At-Risk Students

There are multiple approaches to defining at-risk students in the literature. For example, Betts et al. (2017) explained the term may be variant due to the composition of the student body. In other words, a student who is perceived as at-risk in one school district may not be considered at-risk in a different district. Attrition rates, however, are clearly defined as the loss of a student prior to completing an educational program (Betts et al., 2017). The researchers went on to explain that at-risk can therefore be defined as students who are less likely to complete the program, affecting the attrition rates. Waddington (2019) added to this assertion that, even within the same school district, educators may have a different threshold for how they define at-risk students. Waddington (2019) suggested the lack of an operational definition for at-risk students may limit the effectiveness of interventions as students are assigned based on these thresholds. Some students who would significantly benefit may be left out of the intervention due to their teacher's definition of at-risk students.

Hlost et al. (2017) defined at-risk students as those who are unlikely to achieve the academic expectations. While this has been linked to the potential to dropout, this is not the outcome that the researchers used for measurement. It is notable that Hlost et al. (2017) agreed educators have different thresholds for determining at-risk students, which limits the effectiveness of intervention programs. For instance, they noted that some educators identify a student as at-risk if they receive a grade lower than a C while others may use a B- or a D as an indicator that the student may not achieve these standards. Korhonen and Rautopuro (2019) seemingly combined these differing perspectives by defining at-risk as "incomplete academic learning competences, the differences in students' background characteristics when attending

university or the drift into a situation where there is an increased risk of non-completion of studies" (p. 1061). In this definition, the focus is on both the limitations of the acquisition of knowledge and the potential for the student to fail to complete the program.

Still yet, others focus on a different approach to include external factors that may influence the students' behaviors associated with their education. Larson et al. (2018) explained that students who are on free or reduced lunch programs, those who are from a minority background, and those who are frequently absent should be considered at-risk students regardless of their current academic achievement levels. The researchers justified this approach as these factors have traditionally been associated with a lower graduation rate than students in other populations. While these risk factors will be discussed more in the following section, it is interesting that Larson et al. (2018) defined at-risk based on these factors. Notably, this approach is not uncommon, as Marbouti et al. (2016) explained that predictive modeling is a fundamental process to ensure that early interventions are implemented. The researchers explained that selecting variables with a higher predictive value provides a more accurate result in the assessment of student needs. Unfortunately, Marbouti et al. (2016) also noted that mid-semester grades are often used for these assessments, meaning that a student may already be significantly behind prior to being identified as an at-risk student.

Based on the currently available literature, multiple factors can be used to define and predict at-risk students. It is important that the definition be used consistently to conduct an early assessment. From the multiple definitions identified through the literature, the following operational definition can be stated: an at-risk student is a student who experiences factors that limit their academic achievement, which may lead to their inability or unwillingness to

successfully complete an educational program. These factors can be internal, external, or institutional but must be considered through the context of the student's current level of achievement and monitored throughout their academic career.

Causes and Effects of At-Risk Students

Some risk factors have been presented in the previous sections to identify core themes associated with the causes and effects of students becoming at risk. Specifically, it was determined that internal, external, and institutional causes can lead a student to being at-risk for poor academic achievement levels or failing to complete an academic program. Sahin et al. (2016) focused on the relationship between chronic absenteeism and dropping out of high school. The researchers conducted semi-structured interviews with 64 principals in order to complete a thematic analysis. The researchers identified five primary categories associated with absenteeism to include family-child relationship, ignoring absenteeism, family problems, view of education, and economic impossibilities. Four themes were associated with dropping out: administrator-student relationship, teacher behavior, teacher-student relationship, and attitude about absenteeism. In both sets of themes, Sahin et al. (2016) explained, the school structure and atmosphere were significant. Individual factors included academic failures, illness, and relationships.

Momo et al. (2019) conducted a systematic review of the literature to identify the causes of leaving school without completing the academic program. The researchers reviewed a total of 43 studies ranging from 2001 to 2018. The studies focused on students in Africa and Asia. The primary themes that emerged through the literature were related to family conditions. For example, individuals who lived in poverty or in a single parent home were more likely to leave

school earlier in both countries. Academic achievement was also an indicator as to whether they would remain in school. In Asia, Momo et al. (2019) found that immigration status and ethnicity were also relevant factors. This study also found that cultural beliefs may affect the parents' and students' perception of education. In a culturally diversified school district, it may be necessary to consider these differences when implementing intervention programs to address at-risk students.

Lacour and Tissington (2011) focused specifically on the effects of poverty on academic achievement. In their study, students who are from a low socioeconomic status group scored in the 30th percentile. Students in a middle socioeconomic status group scored in the 45th percentile, and those in an upper socioeconomic status scored in 70th percentile. Even when the researchers accounted for the additional income provided by government assistance, it was determined that students who are on welfare are at least twice as likely to have academic difficulties and fail than their non-welfare recipient peers. Adding to these challenges, the researchers explained that students who have parents that did not complete their diploma are at a much higher risk for dropping out themselves. Lacour and Tissington (2011) explained that students who live in high poverty communities may be exposed to others who do not value formal education, making it essential to counter these beliefs with knowledge and support within the school system and community.

Race has been another area of consideration relating to the causes of at-risk students and their decision to leave school without completing their diploma. According to Darensbourg and Blake (2013), there are significant differences in academic achievement levels for African American students and their white peers. The researchers considered behavioral engagement and

academic value as indicators for academic achievement. Darensbourg and Blake (2013) explained that African American students are more likely to live in poverty which, as noted by Lacour and Tissington (2011), may mean they have less exposure to those who place a high value on formal education than their peers. As this value affects how the students engage in the academic environment, Darensbourg and Blake (2013) indicated this relationship may be a cause for the high prevalence of at-risk students in the African American population.

Meza (2020) asserted that cultural diversity brings many challenges for educators and leaders due to the variation in the students' needs. Genesee and Fortune (2014) contended that bilingual students who attend a school where their first language is not used are at a higher risk for low academic achievement than their peers, while Meza (2020) pointed out many opportunities to overcome these challenges. Genesee and Fortune (2014) claimed that students would benefit from additional support in language acquisition as they can easily fall behind their peers if they are unable to understand the foundational materials.

From a more individual perspective, Chong et al. (2015) maintained that the relationship between emotional intelligence and delinquent behaviors should be considered as a significant cause of leaving school early and failing to achieve academic standards. The researchers explained that students who have a low emotional intelligence exhibit more behavioral issues that will eventually lead them to dropping out of high school. This result will then lead to negative social behaviors including drugs, crimes, and unhealthy or risky health behaviors. The researchers considered emotional intelligence as a measure that could be beneficial to include in intervention programs aimed at ensuring that at-risk students are able to achieve academic

expectations and complete the educational program. This will then help to reduce the negative social effects associated with delinquent behaviors (Chong et al., 2015).

Vanderhaar et al. (2014) claimed that students who are identified as at-risk may suffer negative outcomes as intervention programs are perceived as a punishment rather than a way to address their needs. Students who exhibit the types of behavioral problems discussed by Chong et al. (2015) are sent to alternative schools where their emotional intelligence is not fostered or nurtured. Vanderhaar et al. (2014) added that these students are on what is referred to as the school-to-prison pipeline, with a higher number of African American students being assigned to these schools. As such, race and school structure make the conditions and outcomes far more negative for students who are at-risk due to their emotional intelligence levels (Vanderhaar et al., 2014).

Kamissa (2020) considered the complexities of the individual, family, educational, and societal influences on the students' decisions about attrition and their academic outcomes. The researcher found that students who have a strong support system at home, in the community, and at school have a higher level of academic achievement than those who feel as if they are marginalized or isolated. Kamissa (2020) further noted the effects of dropping out are far-reaching across these areas of influence. For instance, without family support, the student is at-risk for dropping out. They will then have a harder time forming their own family because of the financial and social skills necessary. When the student does not have support in their community, then they will be less engaged in the community when they drop out. Kamissa (2020) added that other consequences include, but are not limited to, more criminal behaviors, lower earning, and limitations to the global economy.

Multiple causes and effects of at-risk students have been explored throughout this section. The predominating themes have focused on individual, external, and institutional influences as well as outcomes. While race and diversity are indicators of being at-risk, individual influences such as emotional intelligence were also included. Poverty was one of the most prevalent causes, but points of intersectionality should also be considered. Negative effects ranged from poor economic outcomes to a cycle of poverty.

Previous Solutions Attempted

At-risks students have received a lot of attention in the literature, discipline, and administration. The current section presents a range of legislation and interventions that have been aimed at improving the conditions for these students. Each attempt will be discussed in terms of its successes and failures as well as opportunities to contribute to a more positive outcome. The first of these to be discussed was introduced earlier in brief. The No Child Left Behind Act of 2002 was signed into law by former President Bill Clinton with the intention of ensuring that educators had all of the necessary resources to achieve student success (Dee & Jacob, 2011). The legislation also held teachers and schools accountable for student outcomes. In principle, the legislation stated that schools and educators have a direct responsibility to ensure that all students achieve academic expectations regardless of any influences on their pursuits. Dee and Jacob (2011) found these outcomes have not been improved, with fourth graders only showing minimal improvements in math and both fourth and eighth grade students showing no improvements in reading achievements.

Not only did the No Child Left Behind Act fail to meet the goals established, Krieg (2011) found that it may have increased the disparities for already at-risk students. Additionally,

the researcher asserted that the changes in the allocation of resources and emphasis placed on achievement tests may have reduced the racial disparities not by uplifting racial minorities, but rather by reducing performance among populations who were previously not considered at risk. While the framework of the No Child Left Behind Act may provide an interesting point for future legislation, the latent benefits were not well considered in the decision-making process.

Another approach to addressing at-risk students identified in the literature is the flipped classroom. According to Flumerfelt and Green (2013), the concept is to flip lecture time into opportunities to engage with the students on a higher level. The classroom resembles an online environment with learning taking place through technological devices, which frees up the time for the teacher to identify any obstacles that the student might be facing. This approach differs from the online classroom in that the students still benefit from in-person support from their peers and teachers. Additionally, students are able to work at their own pace to ensure they do not miss foundational knowledge necessary for scaffolding. In the experiment, Flumerfelt and Green (2013) found students increased their homework completion from 75% to 100%. Additionally, student achievement improved by 11% in the experiment group. Some concerns associated with the flipped classroom may relate to the digital divide or access to sufficient devices to meet the needs of diverse learners. However, based on the evidence presented by Flumerfelt and Green (2013), this approach may be successful for at-risk students.

Perzigian (2018) identified the use of alternative schools as another approach to improving outcomes for at-risk students. This approach will be discussed in more detail relating to school segregation but is important to include in this section for comparison of these attempts. Perzigian (2018) noted these schools are behavioral focused with the goal of increasing social

competences that will support the student's ability to be resilient and successfully complete their degree. However, these schools have a disproportionate number of African American students (Perzigian, 2018). Yet, "students who graduated from an alternative school focusing on behavior remediation identified smaller enrollments, closer and more caring relationships with teachers, and positive behavior supports as significant factors in their success" (Perzigian, 2018, p. 1). Therefore, although there are many areas of opportunity for improvements in this approach, it is important to also note these areas of success.

Lagana-Riordan et al. (2011) also investigated how students feel about these alternative school settings versus traditional school. Their quasi-experimental mixed methods study included 374 students. The students explained they had better teacher relationships at the alternative schools, which may have been due to the smaller class sizes. Additionally, the participants stated they felt safer in the alternative schools and they had better relationships with their peers. The students felt valued and empowered to become more responsible and accountable for their actions. According to Lagana-Riordan et al. (2011), the majority of the students were grateful to have been referred to the alternative school. From this research, Lagana-Riordan et al. (2011) noted the differences were found in offering a strengths-based approach to interacting with the students. The findings from the alternative schools may inform programs to be implemented in traditional school environments.

While there are many approaches and specific programs that could be assessed, the current section has presented one legislation, one change in a traditional classroom, and one alternative school. From each of these, it is possible to consider what has been successful and what has failed. Simply demanding that schools ensure students are all on the same level reduced

achievement for the students who were not at-risk rather than bringing up the students who were. The flipped classroom focuses on individualized learning and improved contact with educators. The alternative schools have smaller class sizes and focus on the students' strengths. A more personalized approach is needed than the one established through the No Child Left Behind Act of 2002. However, sending all at-risk students to an alternative school poses significant social issues. Therefore, a balance within the traditional classroom must be achieved.

School Segregation

While school segregation is a term that appears to be outdated, Martinez and Rury (2012) pointed out there remains a significant influence of cultural and educational opportunities that are substantiated by the availability of resources in the school districts that are densely populated with ethnic minorities. The researchers explained that terms such as deprived or disadvantaged are now perceived as socially inappropriate but acknowledged this might be to hide the truth of school segregation. Historically, according to Martinez and Rury (2012), these terms were indicative of a lack of academic ability among minorities when, in truth, the terms were used as a means to justify school segregation by indicating academic inferiority. However, despite the terminology, school segregation continues to exist within society with minorities receiving fewer resources and, as such, fewer academic opportunities than their non-minority counterparts (Martinez & Rury, 2012). The researchers closed by asserting that society should focus more on the conditions than the use of specific terms.

Reardon (2016) questioned whether it is racial segregation that leads to negative academic achievement outcomes or if it is the reality that the school districts that have higher populations of minority students have poorer academic opportunities. In other words, are the

students performing worse because they are segregated or are the segregated schools receiving different levels of resources? According to Reardon (2016), the single most contributing factor is that school districts that are densely populated with minority students are also in the poorest communities. Therefore, by being poor, the minorities experience their education through the intersectionality of race and income. Notably, these schools are not segregated specifically due to race. Instead, Reardon (2016) explained, the racial income gap supports the racial educational gap by ensuring that minority students remain in the poor communities and have access to the lowest level of academic opportunities that are legally accepted.

Palardy (2013) referred to this form of segregation as socioeconomic segregation but noted that race is often directly associated with socioeconomic status. The researcher acknowledged that segregation based on race is not acceptable. However, this practice has been upheld due to the zoning of school districts based on socioeconomic statuses (Palardy, 2013). Furthermore, Palardy (2013) found this practice has significant implications for at-risk students as the school districts are zoned based on community compositions. This fact means students in high crime districts are only exposed to those who have also experienced a life that is conducive to criminal activities and delinquency. The researcher stated that "peer influences have been linked to a range of school outcomes, behaviors, and attitudes, including achievement, attainment, educational aspirations, misbehavior, drug use, and delinquency" (Palardy, 2013, p. 719). In other words, not only are these students denied access to adequate school resources, but they are also placed into groupings that will influence them by promoting negative behaviors.

Owens (2018) also discussed segregation by socioeconomic status and found there are significant achievement gaps between students of low socioeconomic status and those who are

financially secure. These differences were more noticeable in regions where the socioeconomic status groups were segregated by school district which, according to Owens (2018), is a common practice within urban areas. The researcher further discussed the intersectionality of race and poverty to explain that minorities are more likely to belong to communities that are densely populated with individuals of a lower socioeconomic status group. This means school districts are able to racially segregate while claiming the differences in academic opportunities and achievements are founded in socioeconomic terminology rather than admitting that this segregation is based on racial differences. Notably, this is not to suggest that white students who live in poverty do not feel these differences in opportunities. However, it is meant to express that the context of segregation has not changed, even if the values for these decisions have.

Tyson (2013) asserted that the achievement gap is directly linked to the opportunity gap, with geographical location determining the ability of students to access educational resources. The researcher further explained that students within the same school are segregated based on perceived abilities through a process called tracking. According to Tyson (2013), the issue is in assigning the perception to determine which students are perceived as capable and which are removed from the mainstream classroom. To some extent, the researcher acknowledged the purpose of tracking is that some students learn differently. However, the focus was more on the reality that this practice is used to segregate at-risk students from those who do not experience the same negative influences on their academic achievements.

Agirdag et al. (2012) expressed concerns over segregation by ethnicity and explained that educators take on additional roles as advocates and mentors in these scenarios. However, in their study involving 2,845 students, the researchers found that native students have a higher level of

self-esteem when there is cultural diversity within the school setting. However, the same was not experienced among the minorities. Interestingly, Agirdag et al. (2012) found that the teacher-student relationship was more positive among the native students than for students of minority or immigrant status. In other words, when educators are more receptive to the majority, then the students in this population will respond positively. However, this also means teachers are being less receptive to the minorities, reducing their self-esteem and likely having negative implications for their academic achievement levels.

According to Agirdag et al. (2013), these areas of disparity directly affect the student's ability to reach academic standards, reflecting negatively on the educators. For example, Agirdag et al. (2013) found that, among 2,845 students and 706 teachers, there was a consensus that teachers believe some students are more teachable than others. Unfortunately, those who are deemed worthy of their attention and teaching skills tend to be the native students. Minorities and non-native speakers are perceived as unteachable, meaning they are given less attention and resources than their native peers. Even within the same school or school district, these students are segregated and perceived as inferior. The result of this practice is that these students eventually prove the educators right by failing to meet academic standards, not because they were unteachable but because they were not taught.

Monarrez et al. (2020) considered the implications of charter schools on the practice of school segregation. The researchers pointed out that the implementation of charter schools was intended to give all students the opportunity to attend a high-quality school. However, the they also determined that the acceptance rate for these schools for minority students is lower than for their white peers. As such, Monarrez et al. (2020) asserted that charter schools are another failed

attempt at decreasing school segregation and, instead, have actually increased this practice, claiming that school segregation would decrease by 6% if the option for charter schools was eliminated. Even though the schools are not permitted to specifically deny a student based on race or other demographic conditions, Monarrez et al. (2020) found that this practice is justified through other criteria. Racial segregation in the school system provides positive resources to the majority while ensuring that the minorities are unable to achieve upward mobility (Monarrez et al., 2020).

According to Rothstein (2014), reforms in the school system are not enough to ensure that students have access to equitable resources, and practices such as segregation reflect negatively on the entire social system. If students are segregated based on their living conditions or housing situations, then too many minorities and at-risk students are living in subpar housing. Mobility is an issue for minorities, with 67% of poor young African Americans expected to maintain the cycle of poverty, compared to only 40% of poor white Americans (Rothstein, 2014). In other words, the issues of segregation run deeper than the school system but can only be repaired through institutional changes such as school reform.

Rothstein (2013) also explained that schools are segregated because society is segregated along the lines of both racial differences and socioeconomic statuses. The scholar noted these areas of segregation are supported by discriminatory laws and norms that are upheld by social acceptance. According to Rothstein (2013), the term disadvantaged does not mean living in poverty but rather not having the advantage of equal opportunities to improve one's own outcomes. This fact is the epitome of school segregation, with students in poor communities, often accompanied with a minority status, having access to limited school resources and fewer

academic opportunities. In brief, if a student lives in a poor community and is a minority, then they will not receive the same level of education as their peers due to policies that support school segregation. Rothstein (2013) asserted this reality is well known amongst policy makers but unlikely to change given its social acceptance.

This section has explored the practice of school segregation. Although this concept is outdated, the practice is still very much prevalent. According to the literature reviewed, students who are among minority populations are also more likely to live in poor school districts. Therefore, these schools are segregated by race and socioeconomic status. When the students experience a point of intersectionality to include minority status and poverty, they are more likely to be segregated from their peers. Even within the same school environments, the practice of removing at-risk students from the mainstream classroom was highly prevalent within the literature.

Defunding Urban Schools

For students who are not considered at risk, funding for the basic needs of an appropriate education is not a concern. In fact, according to Frisch (2017), school districts with higher incomes are more likely to also benefit from private donations to add to the already allocated funds for school supplies and resources. Although improving the equity of academic opportunities has been cited as a goal of allowing private funding, private donors are given the option to determine what school districts their funds will benefit. Frisch (2017) pointed out there are no regulations to determine how private donations are allocated across the school district, which likely means the donations benefit students who are not at risk of having a school experience that prevents them from achieving their goals. While Frisch (2017) did not argue

against private donations, she did make a clear call for these resources to be better allocated to ensure equity in the educational system.

Bushaw et al. (2012) summarized a poll conducted by Gallup, which indicated the nation is divided in its perception of the educational system. Although most agree the achievement gap must be closed, there are differing arguments relating to the allocation of funding and accessibility to the education system for immigrants. While respondents agreed urban schools should be supported, political affiliations were clearly influential in determining the allocation of funding. Bushaw et al. (2012) added there is a consensus that the school system is failing to prepare students for the next stage of their life. However, there are too many perspectives to determine how to best prepare them and who should be responsible for the funding necessary to achieve this goal. In other words, the poll presented by Bushaw et al. (2012) clearly illustrated the division within the nation regarding funding the education system.

Yet, McLaren (2017) simplified the budgeting process to ensure that basic education is affordable and accessible. The researcher explained that political, economic, human rights, and administrative considerations must be taken to ensure that the budget is approved. Notably, this is not the same as saying these are all necessary to ensure the budget works to ensure accessibility. However, McLaren (2017) did place this into the context of the Constitution by asserting that access must be universal, equitable, free, and immediate. Therefore, the basic budget must be considered through the complexities of the Constitution as well as the implications of not properly funding education for all students, including negative health and dependency implications. In other words, McLaren (2017) asserted that a failure to fund urban schools is a failure to uphold the Constitution.

Unfortunately, even though urban schools have a higher number of students and a higher student-teacher ratio, these districts do not receive weighted funding, meaning the funds are not allocated per student (Arbuckle, 2011). When districts distribute funds based on the number of students enrolled, students across the district receive a more equitable share of allocated funds. However, this practice is only relevant in theory, as the true allocation of funds is based on the socioeconomic statuses, or tax dollar contributions, within the communities. As students of lower socioeconomic status groups are likely to attend highly populous urban schools, this means these schools receive less funding per student while less populated schools receive more per student. This fact significantly affects the quality and quantity of educators available to students who are among the lower socioeconomic status groups and considered at risk for poor academic outcomes (Arbuckle, 2011).

McKillip and Luhm (2020) explained this practice significantly marginalizes students from racial minority groups and lower socioeconomic status groups. Impoverished students often have more obligations outside of school that may negatively affect their ability to complete assignments or conduct additional academic activities that could help them to overcome the challenges experienced due to low school funding (McKillip & Luhm, 2020). For instance, the researchers found many of these students work after school to help alleviate the family's financial hardships. Other students experience food or housing insecurities that take their focus away from their studies, both in the classroom and after school when they could otherwise be pursuing academic enrichment opportunities. The reality is, according to McKillip and Luhm (2020), all areas that affect the student's academic outcomes should be considered when

determining how to best allocate funds for school activities. However, these districts have failed to recognize the needs of these at-risk students.

One must then ask what the answer to these disparities is and how the educational system can prevent the defunding of urban schools. According to Darling-Hammond (2011), the only answer is to fairly distribute the funds available for education across all school districts and with a purposeful approach to ensuring equity in academic opportunities. Darling-Hammond (2011) contended that fair funding is in the best interest of all members of society, regardless of their initial social or socioeconomic status, and asserted that "as the fate of individuals and nations is increasingly interdependent, the quest for access to an equitable, empowering education for all people has become a critical issue for the American nation as a whole" (p. 20). In other words, taking away educational opportunities from one group to provide an advantage to another population will inevitably harm all members of the society.

Kraft et al. (2015) put these disparities into the context of the educators by conducting interviews with 95 teachers who work in a high poverty school district. According to the educators, they face an increased number of challenges and are expected to fill an expanded number of roles to help to meet the needs of their students without adequate funding or resources. The educators explained that their students face more hardships and challenges to learning than students in more affluent communities, which would mean they also need access to more resources and services to achieve academic standards. However, the opposite of accessibility is experienced in these school districts. As such, the educators need additional training and professional development to meet these needs. Yet, just as the students often

experience, the educators do not have access to these critical resources that could empower them to better meet the needs of their students (Kraft, et al., 2015).

In much the same way as the educators, principals in these school districts often face challenges associated with limited funding. According to Preston et al. (2013), these challenges can range from ensuring that adequate staff is available to ensuring there are no threats to safety and security within the school. Unfortunately, the latter often takes precedence, meaning the students in these schools receive less funding for their education than they do to monitor their behaviors. According to Preston et al. (2013), schools continue to be held accountable for the students' academic achievement. However, the funding necessary to meet these standards is simply not made available throughout many school districts.

It is most notable that there are adequate funds available to meet the needs of all schools through both government funds and private donations. However, these funds are not allocated through equitable methods, meaning many students in poor communities will not be given the knowledge and skills necessary to achieve upward mobility. Regardless of their point of origin, students are aware they are expected to remain within their social or socioeconomic status based on the limitations on their academic opportunities.

School-Based Mentor Programs

Herrera and Karcher (2013) asserted that the school is the ideal setting for mentorship programs, with more volunteers servicing these programs than those at religious organizations. Furthermore, community-based mentorship programs rely on parental referrals, but parents of at-risk student may either be unaware of the available programs or not take the initiative to make the referral for their child (Herrera & Karcher, 2013). However, in the school setting, an educator

can serve as a mentor, or they can make the referral for a volunteer to be assigned to the at-risk student. In addition, Herrera and Karcher (2013) claimed the school environment may be more appropriate for training and supporting volunteers than a community-based mentorship program, where resources may be limited. Of course, challenges of time and commitment, which are found in any program that is dependent on volunteers, remain. However, Herrera and Karcher (2013) noted these challenges can be more readily mitigated in the school environment. Also, school-based mentorship helps the students to practice their social and communication skills, which can then be used in other interactions (Herrera & Karcher, 2013). The mentors are then able to help them by providing feedback as they observe these interactions.

Smith and Stormont (2011) provided insight into how to best develop a school-based mentorship program. The scholars explained there is no one-size-fits all approach to mentorship and that the program must be specifically designed for the target population. The objectives and lines of communication must be clearly defined and shared among all stakeholders in the program. Funding must be taken into consideration as well, as a program cannot be sustainable without resources (Smith & Stormont, 2011). Ending such a program due to a lack of funding may have negative implications for the students who come to rely on these interactions. Smith and Stormont (2011) acknowledged that school-based mentorship programs are complex, but the benefits far outweigh the associated costs. However, it is essential that these costs be included in the planning phase of the program.

Chan et al.'s research (2013) has added that, among the stakeholders in the student's outcomes, it is essential that the parent be included in this relationship. According to the researchers, it is understood that many at-risk students may have difficult relationships with their

parents or their parents may struggle with allocating time to their student due to the demands of a lower socioeconomic status. However, improved relationships between the teacher and the parents will help to strengthen the mentor and mentee relationship as well (Chen et al., 2013). Furthermore, Chan et al. (2013) found that an improved mentoring relationship will then help to build a positive parent-child relationship. According to Chen et al. (2013), relationship building and providing examples of these relationships is the best way to achieve the goal of improving the student's overall quality of life and opportunities.

McDaniel and Yarbrough (2016) defined school-based mentorship programs as programs in which "mentors provide academic instruction and may include social skills instruction or other nonacademic activities" (p. 2). The researchers explained these programs differ from community-based mentorship programs because the school-based mentors spend less time with the students and the meetings are held in an environment that focuses on academics. However, McDaniel and Yarbrough (2016) clarified that these relationships are important because they also help to improve the student's other relationships in the school environment, such as with teachers and administrators. Furthermore, when the relationship with the mentor is positive, the student may also develop a more positive perception of the school environment and academic activities (McDaniel & Yarbrough, 2016). In other words, if the student forms a positive relationship and has positive experiences in the school environment, they may come to feel more positively about the school experiences and relationships in general.

Simoes and Alarcao (2014) acknowledged that educators often fill the role of the mentor in the school environment. However, this is not a replacement for school-based mentoring programs. Instead, the researchers found that educators were able to fill the gaps and reduce

much of the stress experienced by mentors in the classroom setting. Simoes and Alarcao (2014) explained that the overlap of both mentoring and being the educator, although positive in many cases, may cause complications in planning purposeful activities. Yet, when mentoring is approached through collaborative and communicative efforts, then the benefits of these relationships are evident in the classroom (Simoes & Alarcao, 2014). Notably, the researchers explained that the educator maintains an active role in the process while also acknowledging the various roles that must be filled to meet the needs of at-risk students.

In an earlier article, Herrera et al. (2011) randomly assigned 1,139 students to either be mentored by the Big Brothers Big Sisters mentorship program or to be in the control group with typical interactions within the school as normal. According to the researchers, the results of this study were not as positive as was anticipated. At the end of the first year, the students who were mentored illustrated academic improvements, but these were not sustained into the second year. Additionally, they did not find any significant differences in measurements such as global self-worth or classroom efforts. It was noted that school-based mentorship meetings are shorter than experienced in the community-based programs, which may have affected the results of the study. Additionally, Herrera et al. (2011) noted that the matching system used for these students may not have been as successful due to the range of ages represented.

McQuillin and Lyons (2016) provided a theoretical foundation for the use of school-based mentorship. First, the scholars presented the social cognitive theory and explained that mentorship supports the four sources of self-efficacy through goal setting, social persuasion, vicarious experience, and positive affective state. The cognitive dissonance theory was also included in the discussion. McQuillin and Lyons (2016) explained that mentorship elicits change

through the assignment of value. They used an augmented Kirkpatrick training model which has illustrated significant positive implications for academic achievement in mathematics and language, with additional positive outcomes being expressed in life satisfaction and attendance.

Pryce (2012) noted that the relationship between the student and the mentor must be correctly matched and fostered to ensure the best possible student outcomes through the program. The challenges of fostering a strong relationship through mentor attunement. Pryce (2012) claimed that it is essential to recognize that both parties interact with one another through their own worldview and personal characteristics such as age and gender. Comparing the mentoring relationship to the therapeutic relationship of a therapist and client, Pryce (2012) stated the relationship must go beyond empathy and extend to a more in-depth acknowledgement of the other party's experiences and perceptions. This is achieved through a collaborative partnership where the mentee feels valued as much as they value the time and knowledge of their mentor (Pryce, 2012). As such, Pryce (2012) recommended that the interactions between the mentor and mentee be observed to determine if attunement is being achieved or if the match should be adapted.

Lakind et al. (2015) also explored the dynamics of these relationships in mentorship programs. The researchers conducted interviews with nine professional mentors who indicated their perception of the mentee determines how they approach them and conceptualize their needs. By taking the time to get to know the youth and to consider the contexts of their circumstances, the participants could best understand what the mentee needed. However, Lakind et al. (2015) identified a common issue in the relationships: the mentors often felt unsupported by the other adults who were key stakeholders in the youth's life, such as parents and educators.

Lakind et al. (2015) indicated a need for better collaboration and support for the mentors as they try to fill the youth's needs. When the mentors do not feel as if they are taking on too many roles and their roles are clearly defined, they are able to focus more on their relationship with the mentee.

After considering the perceptions of the mentors, it was also relevant to include the perceptions of the mentees. According to Weiss et al. (2019), students also value a strong relationship with their mentors and consider these opportunities as pathways to achieving academic success and higher education. Weiss et al. (2019) conducted 14 separate focus groups with students who had participated in the Avenue Scholars Foundation program. The students were assigned a Talent Advisor who helped them to foster a sense of hope for their futures by identifying their strengths and opportunities. The youth noted that they benefited from the knowledge and time the mentors provided them. Weiss et al. (2019) also noted the schools have a strong relationship with the Talent Advisors, meaning that the mentors have the level of support that was not found by Lakind et al. (2015).

Frels et al. (2013) asserted that ongoing support is essential for mentors to be able to maintain their energy and purpose in the mentoring relationship. While mentors aim to exhibit high energy and a focus on the present, this may be difficult to achieve when they are overwhelmed by filling too many roles (Frels et al, 2013). Frels et al. (2013) noted many of these programs have been unsuccessful due to the lack of emotional support provided to the mentors. Additional concerns were discussed relating to minimal training and development opportunities as well as not having a clear line of communication when a question or concern was identified.

However, when the mentors have this needed support and communication, Frels et al. (2013) found the school-based mentorship programs effectively address the needs of at-risk students.

Núñez et al. (2013) presented a longitudinal study to illustrate the effectiveness of a school-based mentoring program for a middle school. The study involved 94 students who attended seventh grade in one of four classrooms. The students were assessed at baseline and every three months throughout the school year. Two classrooms received the intervention while the other two received normal instruction and support. The researchers found that self-regulated learning was significantly improved in the experiment group across all data collection points. While academic achievement improvements were much lower than self-regulated learning competencies, these improvements were present. The researchers were confident in their assertion that the continuation of this program will yield more significant improvements in both areas of measurement. However, the researchers noted the study was limited to an urban middle school in Portugal, indicating that repeat studies should be conducted to generalize the findings.

Heppen et al. (2018) reviewed a school-based mentorship program called check and connect that was implemented in a high school densely populated with at-risk students. The researchers explained this program had previously achieved positive results for students with disabilities but had not been used for at-risk students. The study involved 533 students in a large urban school district who were identified as having the lowest probability of graduating on time. Students were in the eighth and ninth grade at the beginning of this program, which followed them for three years. Each student was randomly assigned a mentor for the duration of the study. However, Heppen et al. (2018) noted there were no statistical differences between the student outcomes measured. Interestingly, this study omitted many of the areas that have been discussed

in the current section, such as the importance of proper matching and relationship building in order to achieve positive outcomes through a school-based mentorship program.

Wood and Mayo-Wilson (2012) also conducted a systematic review of the literature to determine the effects of school-based mentorship for adolescents relating to academic performance, self-esteem, attendance, attitudes, and behaviors. The researchers included eight studies involving 6,072 total participants. They noted the mentorship programs were not as successful as expected, with self-esteem being the most positive outcomes. However, Wood and Mayo-Wilson (2012) acknowledged the programs may not have been effectively designed or appropriate for the target populations.

Coller and Kuo (2014) conducted a study involving a Youth Empowerment Program to mentor at-risk Latino students in Los Angeles. Sixty-one students in the fourth and fifth grades were paired with a mentor. The primary measure was the length of the relationship, which provides significant insight as to how to best match students with their mentor. The average length of these relationships was one and a half years, with some lasting longer than two years. The researchers claimed the program is an effective way to help at-risk and marginalized students to form positive relationships with others within their community. The researchers further indicated these relationships may help to reduce risky behaviors as the students develop into adolescence. Additional research is necessary to determine the accuracy of these assertions. However, the study provides for a strong foundation to build a matching approach for relationship building.

Tolan et al. (2014) conducted a systematic review to determine the long-term implications of these mentorship programs with a specific focus on delinquency. The researchers

reviewed 46 research studies and found significant positive results. For academic achievements, the researchers reported statistical improvements (d=.11) and (d=.29) for aggression. Based on these findings, it is possible to further justify the assertions made by Coller and Kuo (2014) that mentorship may help to reduce risky behaviors. Of even greater significance to the current study, the researchers provided insight to policy makers who may use this data to support funding for school-based mentorship programs.

Throughout this section, multiple considerations about school-based mentorship programs have been explored. The key components have been presented with a focus on the relationships between all stakeholders in the students' outcomes. The significance of appropriate matching has been indicated throughout the review. Additionally, variations in the findings of associated studies have also been included to illustrate the need to consider these components when designing and implementing a school-based mentorship program.

Summary of Literature Review

Chapter II has presented the available research associated with the key themes of the historical issue of at-risk students, defining at-risk students, causes and effects of at-risk students, previous solutions attempted, school segregation, defunding urban schools, and school-based mentorship programs. For the historical issue of at-risk students, this researcher placed the issues associated with at-risk students into the historical and political contexts. Primarily, the education system has served to maintain the social structures of disparity, leaving marginalized students at a higher risk for dropping out or failing to meet the academic standards exceeded by their peers. As such, these populations are likely to maintain their status in society, whether it be associated with race, socioeconomic status, family composition, or gender. The issues associated with

maintaining these statuses have been discussed in the context of both personal and societal implications. Finally, the emphasis on STEM education as a product of changes in society has been explored to include the social function of the public education system. To define at-risk students, this researcher utilized the literature to establish that: an at-risk student is a student who experiences factors that limit their academic achievement which may lead to their inability or unwillingness to successfully complete the educational program. These factors can be internal, external, or institutional but must be considered through the context of the student's current level of achievement and monitored throughout their academic career.

The predominating themes related to the causes and effects of at-risk students focused on individual, external, and institutional influences as well as outcomes. While race and diversity are indicators of being at-risk, individual influences such as emotional intelligence were also included. Poverty was one of the most prevalent causes, but points of intersectionality should also be considered. Negative effects ranged from poor economic outcomes to a cycle of poverty. In brief, it was determined there are points of intersectionality that significantly increase the causes and effects of being an at-risk student. To identify earlier solutions to these conditions, the review of the literature presented one legislation, one change in a traditional classroom, and one alternative school. From each of these, it is possible to consider what has been successful and what has failed. Establishing a law that required schools to ensure that all students are on the same level reduced the achievement of students who were not at risk rather than bringing up the students who were. The flipped classroom focuses on individualized learning and improved contact with educators. The alternative schools have smaller class sizes and focus on the students' strengths. A more personalized approach is needed than that established through the No

Child Left Behind Act of 2002. However, sending all at-risk students to an alternative school poses significant social issues. Therefore, a balance within the traditional classroom must be achieved.

School segregation was presented as an outdated term but a highly prevalent practice in modern society, with multiple points of intersectionality being relevant to the negative implications of its continuation. It was illustrated that poor communities receive less funding for their schools and that private donations are most often allocated to school districts that already have adequate funding. Therefore, the school system is systematically ensuring that students who are at-risk have less access to school resources and available funding. However, the potential to overcome these challenges has been explored through the integration of school-based mentorship programs. According to the literature, many of these programs have been successful while others have failed. The reason for these differences, according to the literature, is based in the proper matching of the mentor and mentee as well as providing adequate support to all stakeholders in the students' outcomes.

Gaps in the Literature

Although there is a plethora of literature relating to the different themes identified as relevant to this study, few studies have considered the impact of a school-based mentorship program with appropriate support and matching on student outcomes associated with the working definition of at-risk students. As such, this study will provide insight as to how the role of support and matching affects the outcomes for students in a school-based mentorship program.

Chapter III

Methodology

Hillside High School (HHS) has implemented a closing the achievement gap initiative (CTAG). This program includes implementing a school-based mentoring curriculum for students at-risk. The focus is on school based mentoring, to better understand the significance, purpose and importance of a school-based mentoring curriculum for students at-risk to ensure their academic and social success.

Through the use of action research, the researcher sought to examine whether or not a school based mentoring curriculum was linked to student achievement for students at-risk. The Ready Set Grow Academy (RSGA) mentoring programs' intention is to utilize strategic interventions to maximize positive youth outcomes. This is done through a series of core curriculum, focused on: setting personal goals, understanding what type of learner you are, applying to college, understanding what G.P.A means, and the keys to success as a student.

For this study, the engagement of several different varying metrics were used. For example, this study employed the varying methods of surveys, interviews, and focus groups. These methods were utilized to provide a better understanding of the effect of the curriculum on teachers and parents of the students involved in the program.
The following research questions directed and led this study:

1. What are the overall benefits for students at risk who are involved in a school based mentoring program?

2. What are the determining factors that make this program successful?

3. What areas of a student life improve or change significantly as a result of a school based mentoring program?

This chapter will describe the research methodology used to conduct this study as well as provide: (a) research sample (b) overview of research design (c) rationale for research design (d) methods of data collection (e) analysis and synthesis of the data (f) ethical consideration (g) issues of trustworthiness (h) delimitations of the study. And in closing, a summary of the methodology utilized for the chapter.

Research Sample

Hillside Township is located in northern New Jersey. As of the 2010 United States Census, the township's population is 21,404, reflecting a decline of 343 from the 21,747 counted in the 2000 Census, which had in turn increased by 703 from the 21,044 counted in the 1990 Census. The Hillside Public Schools are a comprehensive community public school district that serves students kindergarten through twelfth grade from Hillside, in Union County, New Jersey, United States.

The district is classified by the New Jersey Department of Education as being in District Factor Group (DFG) "CD", the sixth-highest of eight groupings. District Factor Groups organize districts statewide to allow comparison by common socioeconomic characteristics of the local districts. From lowest socioeconomic status to highest, the categories are A, B, CD, DE, FG, GH, I and J. Determining factors include: percentage of adults without a high school diploma, percentage of adults with some level of college education, occupation, unemployment rate, percentage of individuals identified as living in poverty, and median family income.

Classifications are separated into eight groups, with "A" specified as the low end of the socio-economic group and "J" as the highest. As of the last census, the largest District Factor Groups in New Jersey were "I" (105 districts), "DE" (100 districts), "GH" (78 districts). With a median household income of $55,520 and the median family income $67,492 Hillside Township is categorized as a "CD" district, therefore defined as one of the lowest socioeconomic districts in the state. Within the Hillside School District, there are 3,123 students and 260.7 classroom teachers (on an FTE basis), for a student–teacher ratio of 12.0:1.

The Ready Set Grow Academy (RSGA) at Hillside High School was developed by the researcher. The researcher has an extensive back ground in best practices, parental engagement and school based mentoring. The focus and function of the RSGA is to ensure the success of students at-risk. The principal of the high school along with the director of curriculum and instruction developed a plan with the researcher to implement the school-based mentoring initiative. To initiate the plan into action, funding was provided through the school budget to implement the program for one year as a pilot in 2016. The program has endured and continues through Spring 2021 despite obstacles and challenges.

To initiate the plan, a group of the lowest academic performing and most frequently disciplined students, along with students with high absence records were identified as the students at-risk. The researcher presented the thirty two week curriculum and it was approved by the school board. The program launched with an orientation for parents, families of the identified students. Following the orientation the program started and continued throughout the year. A RSGA session occurs twice a week. Students alternate different time slots for those two days to ensure not to miss the class repetitively. Students also have the right to opt in to their regularly

scheduled class when they are on track academically and behaviorally. The truest method of

growth is moving on past the program.

In conducting this study, the researcher sought input from the high school principal, the

director of curriculum and instruction, along with key faculty members. This was due in part to

the fact all faculty had been informed on the topic of school based mentoring as a means to

improve academic outcomes for students at-risk. Select faculty also engaged in professional

development throughout the year pertaining to mentoring, mindfulness and motivation. As such,

the researcher, wanted the study to reflect the view of the select faculty, not just the teachers

engaged with the students at-risk. My area of inquiry is specific to look at the result of a school

based mentoring curriculum for students at-risk.

The following research questions directed and led this study:

1. What are the overall benefits for students at risk who are involved in a school based

     mentoring program?

2. What are the determining factors that make this program successful?

3. What areas of a student life improve or change significantly as a result of a school

     based mentoring program?

Overview of Research Design

This study was conducted utilizing a mixed methodology approach. This method is

employed with a casual approach design and includes a categorical independent variable and the

dependent variable and compares two or more groups . This design was created to examine the

impact of the program on students' academic and social performance. Due in part to the fact that

both areas, academic and social behavior, are inextricably linked to the reason for being selected

to participate in the program. The researcher used a mixed methodology designed to compare

the students at risk by looking for differences in the outcomes of academics and social

performance. To be clear, social performance can be defined as the social behavior of the student.

A behavior that is self-controlled and lacks the excessive discipline referrals that exist with this

cohort of students at-risk. The outcome measures included GPAs, discipline referrals, in school

and out of school suspensions, expulsions, school attendance and even juvenile court

involvement. While using a qualitative method approach, the researcher examined the impact

and effect the Ready Set Grow Academy program had on academic performance of the students

being analyzed on the level of Ready Set Grow Academy participation. The rationale for using

the mixed methodology approach was to evaluate the Ready Set Grow Academy group in terms

of the research questions. In other words, do Ready Set Grow Academy participants improve

academically and socially participants , particularly in the areas of improving their academics,

their social behavior and eligibility to graduate with a high school diploma. The research data

for this study involved the Ready Set Grow participants for the school year's 2016 to 2021. The

research participants were selected specifically by the principal of the high school due to low

academic performance and high discipline referral. The participants of the study were receiving

Ready Set Grow Academy services at the time of the research.

The instrument used for the quantitative method was a survey to measure the outcomes of

the school based mentoring program. The questionnaire has four areas to answer the questions

ranging from strongly agreeing to strongly disagreeing with the question asked. The

questionnaire is broken down into two parts: Teachers/Faculty and Parents.

<center>Teachers/ Faculty</center>

1) Would you say there are overall benefits for students who are involved in a school based mentoring program?

2) Do you agree with the determining factors that make this program successful?

3) Do you believe the student's life has improved or changed significantly as a result of a school based mentoring program?

4) Have you observed an increase in the mentored students' attendance in your class?

5) Have you observed an increase in the mentored students' class participation?

6) Do you believe the curriculum provided has made a difference in the life of the student?

7) Has there been academic improvement for the at-risk student engaged in the program?

8) Overall has the student shown appreciation for the program and increased communication with you about it and/or the topics covered?

9) Has the program helped you as a teacher in any way, shape or form in working with the student?

10) Do you believe more schools should implement school based mentoring programs?

<center>Parents & Guardians Survey</center>

1) Have you noticed an improvement in your child's self esteem?

2) Is your child's grades/G.P.A as high as you would like them/it to be?

3) Is doing well in school important to you?

4) Is doing well in school important to your child?

5) Do you believe your child's teacher(s) want them to do well in school?

6) Do you believe a mentoring program is important for your child during school hours?

7)Do you believe your child's mentor is interested in seeing your child succeed?

8) Do you want your child to go to college or post secondary school?

9) Does your child want to go to college or secondary school?

10) Do you believe the Ready Set Grow Academy School Based Mentoring Program had a significant impact on your child?

The qualitative instruments were focus groups and interviews for the qualitative approach The focus group questions for the interviews are as follows:

1. What are the overall benefits for at-risk students who are involved in a school based mentoring program?

    (Why do you see it as a benefit/Give me an example of how that works)

2. What are the determining factors that make this program successful?

    (Why do you think it's a determining factor, give me an example of why it's a determining factor)

3. What areas of a student life improve or change significantly as a result of a school based mentoring program? (a) How did it improve? (b) Why did it improve?

The interview question for the one on one interviews are as follows:

Research Question 1

What are the overall benefits for students at risk who are involved in a school-based mentoring program?

What are the academic benefits? Please explain and provides some examples

Is there a significant difference in the attendance rate of the students who participated in the mentoring program from the spring semester of the previous year to the spring semester of the current year?

Is there a significant difference in the reading and math grades from the students after participating in the school-based mentoring program?

Is there a significant difference in the number of discipline referrals of the students involved in the mentoring relationships strengthened?

Have you observed an increase in the mentored students' class participation?

What are some of the behavioral or social benefits? Please explain and provide some examples?

What are some of the attitudinal benefits? Please explain and provide some examples

What are the overall benefits for students at risk who are involved in a school-based mentoring program?

Research Question 2

What are the determining factors that make this program successful?

What factors make this program successful?

How critical is the selection of a mentor? Why?

How important is the mentor-student relationship? Why? Provide some examples.

How important is the curriculum? Please explain and provide some examples.

In your mind, what is the most important aspect of this program?

What would you recommend to make this program more successful?

Research Question 3

What areas of a student life improve or change significantly as a result of a school-based mentoring program?

Have you observed any changes in students' expectations? Do they set higher goals for themselves? Please explain and provide examples.

Rational for the Research Design

This rational of the research approach was to discover the impact of a mentoring program on students' attendance, academic scores and behavior referrals. The need for the studywas identified as the correct approach for this investigation. The investigation utilized several methods of data collection. The purpose was to gain a stronger knowledge of students at-risk and how their outcomes are altered as a result of school-based mentoring. Bloomberg & Volpe (2019) explain how action research is a systematic collaborative and democratic orientation inquiry that seeks effective solutions to complex problems that people confront their communities and organizations. It is fair to say that action research has considerable application to this study as this type of research is valuable by those those engaged in professional, organizational, educational and community research.

For greater clarity a further explanation of data collection is offered by Bloomberg & Volpe (2019). They state, when one can gain particular insight of their participants utilizing qualitative research, it is seen as an efficient and effective means to acquire data as a reliable tool and source. In addition, Creswell (2016) provides more information, describing how qualitative instruments for research purposes work when identifying open ended questions as a

defining characteristic. He continues, by explaining how open ended questions provide an open opportunity for the researcher to become the data collection instrument (Creswell, 2016).

With a clear understanding of how qualitative research has an immense value, this researcher utilized focus groups and interviews in an effort to obtain qualitative data. The instruments utilized allowed faculty, parents and teachers to provide their perceptions, in relation to their students learning and behavioral development. It is important to gain their perspectives to obtain a true understanding for the study. As previously stated, the students at Hillside High School were identified at the beginning of the school year. As a result, the students' parents, teachers and faculty, were the voices needed to support the data.

Bloomberg & Volpe (2019) share that the function of quantitative research exists in certain conditions such as examining relationships and studying cause-and-effect interactions. Utilizing a dual methodology consisting of qualitative and quantitative data is a strong determination in having an ethical outcome This qualitative data approach may be used to gain a better understanding from results that shape as a quantitative method. For this study to be successful both of these methods bring forth benefits. And so, as it relates to this study, the researcher used and sought it necessary to implement a mixed methods approach. The data collected will be used in making an educated decision pertaining to scoping out next steps in the continuation, future implementation and development of the Ready Set Grow Academy.

Methods of Data Collection

The study engaged a research design defined as mixed methods. It was launched to examine students at risk and their involvement in a school-based mentoring. The study the researcher created engages a survey as a quantitative instrument and focus groups and interviews as means to collect qualitative data. This was intended for the researcher to understand the impact and affect the school based mentoring curriculum had on students at risk. To come to this conclusion from a relevant backing a triangulation of data sources were critical. Creswell (2016) describes triangulation as, "*an effective method and checking the accuracy of the interpretations the researcher deduces*". In addition triangulation is seen as a systematic crosschecking of information and conclusions according to Bloomberg & Volpe (2019).

In an effort to design a reputable study, the researcher concluded that the methods met the data collection standards. To that end multiple methods of data collection were necessary, as well as a triangulation approach.

Triangulation Matrix

Research Questions	Data Source #1	Data Source #2	Data Source # 3	Data Source #4
What are the overall benefits for at-risk students who are involved in a school based mentoring program?	Teacher Survey	Parent Survey	Faculty/Admin Interviews	Parent Focus Groups
What are the determining factors that make this program successful?	Teacher Survey	Parent Survey	Faculty/Admin Interviews	Parent Focus Groups
What areas of a student life improve or change significantly as a result of school based mentoring program?	Teacher Survey	Parent Survey	Faculty/Admin Interviews	Parent Focus Groups

Survey

All parents of students in the Ready Set Grow Academy, along with select teachers and faculty, were contacted via email with an invitation to complete the survey. A link was provided to the participant to access and complete the 10 minute survey. In addition, a narrative informing the participants of the purpose of the study accompanied the survey. As well as a written document informing the purpose of the survey. There was also a Standard Adult Consent Form. This form is an agreement that the researcher does not expect any foreseeable risks to the participant. There is no plan to reimburse the participant for any costs or injury they might incur as a result of participating in this study. Also recognition that the participant was volunteering their time. A

survey was seen as an effective data collection form. One may recognize, that due to it being online, it was very quick and convenient. The survey administered consisted of specific questions as well as ten open ended questions. This allowed for the collection of quantitative and qualitative data. Had these strategies not been incorporated, it is the researcher's belief, that there would have not been a value placed upon the survey. Within a survey it is the open ended questions that tap into personal experiences and shed light on participant's perceptions according to Bloomberg & Volpe (2019). This is intended to gain further insight into parents, teachers and faculty perceptions about school-based mentoring. In an attempt to gain further knowledge into parents, teachers and faculty perceptions about the Ready Set Grow Academy, the three open ended questions I asked were the following:

Teachers/ Administrators

1) Would you say there are overall benefits for students who are involved in a school based mentoring program?

| Strongly Agree | Agree | Disagree | Strongly Disagree |

2) Do you agree with the determining factors that make this program successful?

| Strongly Agree | Agree | Disagree | Strongly Disagree |

3) Do you believe the student's life has improved or changed significantly as a result of a school based mentoring program?

| Strongly Agree | Agree | Disagree | Strongly Disagree |

4) Have you observed an increase in the mentored students' attendance in your class?

| Strongly Agree | Agree | Disagree | Strongly Disagree |

5) Have you observed an increase in the mentored students' class participation?

| Strongly Agree | Agree | Disagree | Strongly Disagree |

6) Do you believe the curriculum provided has made a difference in the life of the student?

Strongly Agree   Agree   Disagree   Strongly Disagree

7) Has there been academic improvement for the at risk student engaged in the program?

Strongly Agree   Agree   Disagree   Strongly Disagree

8) Overall all has the student shown appreciation for the program and increased communication with you about it and or the topics covered?

Strongly Agree   Agree   Disagree   Strongly Disagree

9) Has the program helped you as a teacher in any way, shape or form in working with the student?

Strongly Agree   Agree   Disagree   Strongly Disagree

10) Do you believe more schools should implement school based mentoring programs?

Strongly Agree   Agree   Disagree   Strongly Disagree

Parents & Guardians Survey

1) Have you noticed an improvement in your child's self esteem?

Strongly Agree   Agree   Disagree   Strongly Disagree

2) Is your child's grades/G.P.A as a student how you would like them/it to be?

Strongly Agree   Agree   Disagree   Strongly Disagree

3) Is doing well in school important to you?

Strongly Agree   Agree   Disagree   Strongly Disagree

4) Is doing well in school important to your child?

Strongly Agree   Agree   Disagree   Strongly Disagree

5) Do you believe your child's teacher(s) want them to do well in school?

Strongly Agree   Agree   Disagree   Strongly Disagree

6) Do you believe a mentoring program is important for your child during school hours?

Strongly Agree   Agree   Disagree   Strongly Disagree

7)Do you believe your child's mentor is interested in seeing your child succeed?

Strongly Agree   Agree   Disagree   Strongly Disagree

8) Do you want your child to go to college or secondary school?

Strongly Agree   Agree   Disagree   Strongly Disagree

9) Does your child want to go to college or secondary school?

Strongly Agree   Agree   Disagree   Strongly Disagree

10) Do you believe the Ready Set Grow Academy School Based Mentoring Program has had a significant impact on your child?

Strongly Agree   Agree   Disagree   Strongly Disagree

It was important for the researcher to follow and adhere to the recommendations expressed by Stringer (2006) and Bloomberg & Volpe (2019). The research inquiries must correlate with each other. As a result, the researcher allowed for a two week window for the completion of the survey. Reminder emails were sent out at the one week mark. Upon completing the survey, participants were provided a thank you email.

Focus Groups

According to Bloomberg & Volpe (2019), action research is typically participatory and collaborative and can employ both quantitative and qualitative data collection methods. Qualitative methods include observation, interview, and focus group. Focus groups are one of the most commonly used types of qualitative data collection methods. Focus groups, or group interviews, are facilitated group discussions and possess elements of both participant observation and individual interviews while also maintaining their own uniqueness as a distinctive research method (Barbour, 2018; Liamputtong, 2011). A focus group is essentially a group discussion focused on a single theme (Kreuger & Casey, 2015; Stewart & Shamdasani, 2015).

In this investigation there was a common denominator in regards to all the participants being from the same school district within the focus group. All were aware and informed of the Ready Set Grow Academy mentoring curriculum. Therefore all teachers of students in the Ready Set Grow Academy are sought to participate in the focus group. In assembling the focus groups the researcher aimed to have teachers, parents and administrators representing different perspectives and observations. It is strongly suggested that around eight participants is a pinnacle number to have in a focus group (Krueger and Casey, 2009; Gill, 2008). The researcher acknowledged this suggestion, honing in on the eight teachers, parents and administrators selected for this focus group. They were provided with a consent form indicating that the contents of the conversations would be recorded and transcribed. The questions presented by the moderator have been advisor-reviewed to validate that they were fair and neutral. This showed

no bias of the researcher and that they were aligned to the identified research questions. Participants were informed of the 60-90 minute time commitment.

Interviews

Interviews were necessary for the final method of data collection for this dissertation. As stated by Creswell (2016), interviews are recognized as a valuable tool for collecting qualitative data. Particularly in that they enable individuals to share personal perspectives, while also allowing the researcher to ask follow-up questions or probes to gain further clarity on a subject (Cresswell, 2016).

To recruit the 8 interview participants from each category, an introduction email and information sheet was sent to all faculty of students selected to be in the program. Also three administrators were selected. Finally, to recruit the parents, an introduction email and information sheet was sent to all parents, teachers, and admin. The researcher selected the first eight parents to respond to the email. Interviewees were presented with information regarding the study. They also received information that their involvement was fully and completely voluntary. A consent form was signed by each of the interviewees preceding the interview. They were also informed that recording was being taken place. Given that the researcher is a local stakeholder who operates a local education agency and is a qualified CITI certified professional. The researcher conducted and recorded the interviews using VerbalInk

Analysis and Synthesis of the Data

For the purposes of this action research investigation, a survey generated through Google Forms was used to collect data. Google Forms is a web-based platform for participants to take a survey online, anonymously, and send directly back to the researcher. Google Forms are integrated with Google spreadsheets, thereby allowing access to a spreadsheet view of the accrued data so it can be analyzed and interpreted. The survey was developed with closed responses on a scale of strongly agree to strongly disagree, with this method indicating the levels of agreement. The closed responses yielded quantitative results. Open-ended responses were also included in the survey which produced qualitative results. Only the researcher had access to the data through an individual username and password. Given the functionality of Google Forms, the researcher was able to manipulate the results from spreadsheet form into various charts and graphs to gain further understanding of the meaning of the data.

Qualitative data was collected through focus groups and interviews. In both cases, recording devices were used to capture responses. The recordings were transcribed verbatim and participants were assigned identification codes. Once the data collection was complete, the researcher began the process of coding, or reducing and organizing the results into manageable parts. To accomplish this, the researcher followed the recommendation of both Cresswell (2016) and Bloomberg & Volpe (2019), in which the purpose of the study and the designated research questions were used to guide the identification of themes and categories. Utilizing the study's intent as well as the specific research questions, the researcher assigned a distinctive method in order to analyze the participants' responses and identify themes that emerged.

Ethical Considerations

A comprehensive consent to participate form incorporates several elements including: right to voluntarily withdraw at any time; identification of the purpose of the study and procedures to be used in data collection; assurance of confidentiality; risks and/or benefits associated with participation (Cresswell, 2016). Finally, the signature of both the researcher and the participant provide evidence of informed consent. The researcher used this sample as a template for developing a comparable letter for participants in her study.

In addition to obtaining informed consent from all participants, all names were kept confidential and identities were referred to as specific numbers. To further ensure anonymity, only limited demographic information was requested. This survey was only identified for the Hillside High School Ready Set Grow Academy program. Specifically, participants were asked to be a part as a result of being identified by the principal in relation to their involvement with the student cohort. Understanding the importance of confidentiality, the researcher relied upon Google Forms for the survey and focus groups and interviews were recorded and transcribed by an outside company. Additionally, the interviews and focus groups were conducted by a CITI certified colleague to address the concern of the researcher's administrative role within Hillside school district school. As a final consideration, the interviews and focus groups were conducted in a neutral location, designated as private for the duration, thereby creating a disruption-free environment. As data was collected, it was stored in a Google drive in the researcher's cloud, with the intention of destroying it all at the conclusion of the investigation.

Issues of trustworthiness

When looking at qualitative research, the term trustworthiness is one that must be defined. As we look at trustworthiness it can refer to, and deal with, the validity and reliability of a research study according to Bloomberg & Volpe (2019). It is said that if research is valid, it clearly reflects the work being described, and if work is reliable, then to researchers studying the same phenomenon will come up with compatible observations (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2019). The valuation of trustworthiness was critical, the credibility was emphasized in a dependable and trust worthiness manner as it relates to quality of research. One can look at credibility as a term that is aligned with validity (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2019). Credibility can also refer to the ability of the researcher in presenting how the participants act, think and feel. This is in addition to what one would say is an accurate manner to ensure that the participants trust the ethics of the process (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2019). It is safe to say as well, examples of evidence credibility happen after the researcher has monitored his or her own assumptions and remove them (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2019). When looking at dependability, one must realize that it refers to the ability of the researcher to monitor and oversee the key procedures that are used to collect and also extrapolate the interpretation of the data Bloomberg & Volpe (2019). The researcher also provided a detailed explanation as it related to the analysis in the collection of the data. In regards to this particular study there was no focus on transferability. Transferability occurs as a result of the reader looking through a detail description provided by the researcher and deciding whether similar processes fit into the local setting. It is unlikely that these results are transferable. Yet, the ideas and conclusions that resulted from this particular study, may in fact be helpful and useful to other school districts throughout the State of New Jersey and nationally as well.

In this action research investigation, the researcher focused on validity and reliability as indicators of trustworthiness. And so to ensure the reliability, the validity and the credibility of the study, the researcher will use multiple methods of both qualitative and quantitative data to support triangulation (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2019). In this study a survey, which is quantitative in nature as well as interviews from focus groups will occur to achieve triangulation. It is also important to note that as the process moves along the researcher will self reflect on a consistent basis to observe monitor and review any subjective or personal bias (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2019). The researcher is very clear that there will be new ways of looking at the data that will be presented.

Reliability

According to Ritchie and Lewis (2013) reliability can be defined as the replicability of research findings. In other words, can the findings from this study be replicated in another study if the same methods were utilized? To make certain this study had the capacity to replicate findings and therefore be characterized as reliable, the researcher took several measures. The survey was given to non-participants as a "pre-test" and doctoral colleagues evaluated the focus group and interview questions to check for reliability. Additionally, inter-rater reliability was utilized by the researcher and doctoral colleagues to code responses for overarching themes and patterns. One final element used to produce a reliable study was a triangulation matrix approach. By using three specific instruments (survey, focus groups, interviews), varied perspectives on the same issue were collected.

Validity

Cresswell states that validity can be defined as as the fact that "findings are accurate or are plausible" (Cresswell, 2016). Validity also examines if the findings are accurate and credible from the stance of the involved parties. This includes the researcher, the participants and the audience, according to Bloomberg and Volpe (2019). Knowing that quantitative research derives data from numbers that are pure and concrete, while qualitative research relies on personal input from various participants. This data is then made clear by the researcher. To say the least, ensuring validity in qualitative research can be complicated. To ensure validity in this study, multiple checks were put in place.

Creating a content validity process means the researcher aims to utilize or develop instruments for data collection that are aligned with the research questions that are being asked. In developing instruments for this study, fellow doctoral aspirants and advisors examined the questions for the survey, focus group and interviews to determine if alignment existed. All questions were also assessed for readability and lucidness. Once feedback was provided, questions were edited to ensure and make certain of their validity and further ensure a correlation directly with the three specific research questions.

Supplementary measures were ascertained to construct a valid study. For the survey, Google Forms was utilized as a tool to automatically sort data into spreadsheets, charts and graphs to allow for clear analysis by the researcher. For the focus groups and interviews, sessions were audiotaped, transcribed, and coded by an outside agency to promote accurate representation of the participants responses. By using three separate tools (survey, focus groups, interviews), the researcher employed a triangulation matrix approach to the study. Planning

upon several methods and numerous sources, allowed the researcher to pin point and amplify themes emerged from the data. A triangulation matrix provides an advantage to the study. Weyers, Strydom and Huisamen state, "If a multi-method approach is implemented, it will yield a multitude of information from diverse perspectives on the same issue and, in so doing, enhances the understanding of the deeper and varied dimensions of the given phenomenon" (Weyers, Strydom, & Huisamen, 2014, pg. 210).

Delimitations of the Study

Delimitations referred to the initial choices that are made about the broader, overall design of your study. This should not be confused with documenting the limitations of your study that were discovered after the research has been completed Bloomberg and Volpe (2019). As a result, it is important to note that the researcher has complete autonomy and control as it relates to the delimitations of the study and must acknowledge what other approaches were not attainable for the study (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2019).

The examples of the delimitation are described precisely as, the location of the study and the sample that is used to participate in the research (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2019). This study focuses on one high school, in an urban school district setting, in Northern New Jersey, with a specified limited number of participants. There are only eight teachers selected to be a part of this study in the high school. Therefore it is important to note there will be a limited number of findings as a relates to or in comparison to larger dish in addition one should also note that the lumen nations also relate to the number of participants that will participate in the various methods of the data collection for this study. Eight teachers and ten parents will be involved in

this study along with five faculty members.

Summary of the chapter

This chapter provided a precise account of the research methodology for the study. The researcher will utilize survey's, interviews and focus groups to further gain an in-depth understanding of the impact and affect a school-based mentoring curriculum as on students at-risk in an urban school district high school. The teachers who instruct students at-risk will partake in the study. In addition to parents and key faculty. Prior to the inquiry, research participants will have a strong grounding of the purpose of the study. In addition, they will receive details describing the confidentiality for their protection. The questions that will be presented relate directly to the research along with the multiple methods of data collection to support triangulation, in addition to the Board of Education. Findings from the study will aid in showcasing the use and need of a school-based mentoring curriculum for students at-risk in the district.

Chapter IV

Results & Findings

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to examine the impact and effect of school-based

mentoring on at-risk students in an urban school district. The study was conducted during a

virtual learning environment due to the COVID-19 pandemic, using data generated by a survey

of teachers and parents, a parent focus group, and one-on-one interviews with teachers and

administrators. Chapter IV provides a descriptive analysis of both the quantitative and qualitative

results obtained during the data collection process. Based on the data retrieved from the survey,

focus group, and interviews, the researcher presents findings that answer the three research

questions of this mixed methodology descriptive study:

1. What are the overall benefits for at-risk students who are involved in a school-based

   mentoring program?

2. What are the determining factors that make this program successful?

3. What areas of a student's life improve or change significantly as a result of a school-

   based mentoring program?

The findings of this study will guide the decision making in regards to future plans for

supporting and promoting the school-based mentoring curriculum for at-risk students in the

Hillside School District.

Organization of Chapter IV

This chapter begins with a concise overview of the instruments employed for data

collection as well as a review of the demographics of the participants in the study. The data

analysis process will then be described, followed by the findings as they relate to the three

research questions. A brief summary is provided at the conclusion of Chapter IV.

Instrumentation

To acquire data related to the three research questions, three instruments were utilized: (a)

a teacher/parent survey, (b) a parent focus group, and (c) five one-on-one teacher interviews and

four one-on-one district administrator interviews. All teachers and parents were invited to

complete the survey. In addition, purposeful random sampling was also employed to secure

participants for the focus group as well as the interviews. Prior to the data collection procedure,

all instruments were reviewed by cohort colleagues from Saint Elizabeth University to assess the

readability and lucidness of the statements and questions within each instrument. Following is a

description of the data sources and methods used in this study.

Survey

A survey was developed to collect quantitative data (see Appendix A). Quantitative data

was collected via 10 questions on the survey. Google Forms was utilized to create and

disseminate the survey. Of 79 faculty members at Hillside High School, eight (10.1%)

participated in the survey. Of 85 parents at Hillside High School, 16 (18.9%) participated. The

responses for the quantitative component were generated using a Likert scale for participants to

indicate whether they strongly agreed, agreed, disagreed, or strongly disagreed with the

statements. Four questions correlated to Research Question 1 regarding the overall benefits of a

school-based mentoring program for at-risk students. To address Research Question 2, three

questions were included in the survey related to the determining factors that make this program

successful. Finally, three questions in the survey related to the areas of a student's life that

improved or changed significantly as a result of a school-based mentoring program, to acquire data for Research Question 3.

Focus Group

In this study, one focus group consisting of five parents was conducted as a means of collecting qualitative data related to all three research questions. All parents involved in the Ready Set Grow Academy parental engagement group were invited to participate in the focus group. In assembling the focus group, the researcher sought to specifically include parents of students involved in the school-based mentoring program. Thus, the researcher engaged purposive sampling to create the focus group, as there was a specific rationale for selecting participants. The researcher aimed to gather input from parents of students involved in the program. To achieve this, the parents were asked to accept the invitation to participate in the focus group. The researcher holds a role as an outside vendor to the district, which places him in a position of neutrality in the district. Therefore, the focus group was conducted by the researcher, who is a CITI-certified doctoral student in the educational doctoral program at Saint Elizabeth University. During the focus group, the purpose of the research study was reinforced, and confidentiality was ensured. With permission from the participants, the one-hour session was recorded and later transcribed by Verbalink (Ubiqus), an online transcription company.

Interviews

One-on-one interviews were the final method of data collection utilized for this study. In total, four district administrator interviews and five teacher interviews were conducted in order to collect qualitative data. To recruit participants, an email and information sheet was sent to key district administrators and teachers who have participated in the school-based mentoring

program. The researcher selected the first teachers and district administrators who responded to the email. Following protocol, interviewees were provided with pertinent information about the study. They were reminded their participation was voluntary. Given the researcher is an outside vendor who provides services for the district, there is no conflict related to acquiring data in the district. Therefore the researcher, being a CITI-certified researcher, conducted and recorded each of the interviews. The interviews were transcribed, and the researcher analyzed and coded the transcriptions to reveal the findings of the study.

Triangulation

Using triangulation as a method of analysis, as well as several sources of data, ensured the validity of the research. The data that was collected throughout the study is characterized as both quantitative and qualitative.

Findings and Results

The following section provides a comprehensive description of the major findings of the study correlated to the three research questions. Throughout this section, each research question is identified and followed by the significant related findings, including an overview of the data sources relied upon to substantiate the analysis. Chapter IV concludes with a general summary of the findings as related to the original research questions. The findings to emerge from this study are:

1. A majority of teachers, parents, and administrators at Hillside High School perceive stronger attendance and lower discipline referrals as benefits for at-risk students who are involved in a school-based mentoring program.

2. Administrators, teachers, and parents perceive improved academic outcomes as a benefit of a school-based mentoring program.

3. Teachers, administrators, and parents perceive a mentor, along with a structured leadership curriculum and regularly scheduled meeting times, are identifiable factors in making the program successful.

4. Parents, teachers, and administrators perceive the school-based mentoring program to have a significant impact on a student's self-esteem and class participation.

Research Question 1: What are the overall benefits for at-risk students who are involved in a school-based mentoring program?

Finding 1: A majority of teachers, parents, and administrators at Hillside High School perceive stronger attendance and lower discipline referrals as benefits for at-risk students who are involved in a school-based mentoring program.

Survey Results. Four survey questions were asked related to Research Question 1 to determine teachers' and parents' perceptions of the overall improvement of the at-risk students engaged in the school-based mentoring program. According to the responses, teachers and parents believed there are benefits for at-risk students who are engaged in a school-based mentoring program. In response to the question, "Would you say there are overall benefits for students who are involved in a school-based mentoring program?" 62.5% of participants strongly agreed and 37.5% agreed. In contrast, zero respondents disagreed or strongly disagreed. In response to Question 2, "Do you agree with the determining factors that make this program successful?" 62.5% of respondents strongly agreed and 37.5% agreed, while zero respondents disagreed or strongly disagreed. In response to the question, "Do you believe the student's life

has improved or changed significantly as a result of a school-based mentoring program?" 37.5%

expressed strong agreement, 25% agreed, and 37.5% disagreed. Finally, in response to the

question, "Have you observed an increase in the mentored students' attendance in your class?"

25% strongly agreed that they have witnessed an increase in attendance, 62.5% agreed, and

12.5% disagreed. Table 2 provides an overview of the data.

Table 2

Survey Results for Questions Aligned to Research Question 1: What are the overall benefits for

at-risk students who are involved in a school-based mentoring program?

Survey Question	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Would you say there are overall benefits for students who are involved in a school-based mentoring program?	62.5%	37.5%	0%	0%
Do you agree with the determining factors that make this program successful?	62.5%	37.5%	0%	0%
Do you believe the student's life has improved or changed significantly as a result of a school-based mentoring program?	37.5%	25%	37.5%	0%

Survey Question	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Have you observed an increase in the mentored students' attendance in your class?	25%	62.5%	12.5%	0%

In developing the survey, the researcher operated under the assumption that in order for an at-risk student to be mentored through a school-based mentoring model, there needs to be identifiable ways to engage with the program. Specifically, in investigating a school-based mentoring program in the lives of students who are at-risk, the researcher wanted to know if teachers and parents believed that the school-based mentoring model would improve the overall outcomes for at-risk students. The survey revealed teachers and parents believed there are overall benefits for students who are involved in a school-based mentoring program.

Focus Group Results. Parents who volunteered to participate in the focus group provided feedback consistent with the results of the survey, identifying the general importance of a school-based mentoring program for students who are at-risk. All five participants made statements affirming the importance of a school-based mentoring curriculum for at-risk students. Respondent 1 stated:

> The benefits would be a reduced level of discipline issues. Community isn't only in the streets, it's in the schools as well. If we can get those [students] to attend class and behave better, now we are building a stronger community. Sometimes it takes a program like this to achieve those goals.

Respondent 3 described the importance of having a more diverse group to support the student:

I think the help and support of the mentor program assisted me, personally. My child's

counselor did absolutely nothing, so I just felt like the mentoring program pushed him to

do more. So I think that would be the benefit.

It is important to note, this use of the word "counselor" refers to school guidance counselors.

This is separate from mentors who participate in the mentoring program. Respondent 3 was

expressing the perspective that the regular school guidance counselor assigned to their child was

not helpful, and the mentor helped to fill in that gap.

A final theme that surfaced when the focus group was discussing the overall benefits of a

school-based mentoring program was the element of good behavior. Students have changed their

attitudes and behavior toward authority and those who spend time mentoring them. Respondent 5

stated:

I have seen a significant change in the way my child behaves and acts around the house.

And oftentimes, that is just not the case. There are programs that come into our city and

little impact is made on the child. This program has been able to accomplish a change and

focus on helping my child become more obedient and respectful towards the teachers in

the school and the school leadership. But most importantly toward me.

Similarly, Respondent 2 shared:

I believe there are several positive factors. For me, I'm just thankful there are no more

phone calls from the Vice Principal. He doesn't call as often as he used to; in fact he sent

a message sharing that my son has had lower discipline issues compared to last year. I

shared that with my baby and looked at his face light up. I finally can encourage his

progress.

Lastly, Respondent 1 offered these words:

> And I think that's very, very important for students at-risk, because often times we'll find
> these students in the urban environment because there are high discipline referrals, and
> often times students will act out and have these discipline referrals because of the lack of
> engagement. With engagement comes change.

Interviews. The five teachers and four administrators who participated in one-on-one interviews provided responses supporting the results from the survey as well as the focus group. All nine interviewees strongly agreed a school-based mentoring curriculum for at-risk students should be a permanent program in the district. One major benefit identified by administrators and teachers was the component of civic engagement. Participant 3 shared:

> I think one of [the benefits] is to give back because when I think about it, I've seen
> students who have been successful in this mentoring program, they have an opportunity
> now to peak, sort of become mentors themselves to us, to either siblings or students in the
> lower grades. So for instance, I know that you were doing something similar, like, similar
> to that side where you had high school students coming in and working with the students
> in the middle school to talk about how they should conduct themselves during the school
> day.

Participant 4 added:

> As you can see, there is a shift in attitude from these students that then starts to create a
> climate change for [the] younger students as well. I have noticed a change in the life of
> the student in regards to their attendance and discipline. Before the program I couldn't

share a positive update. But now I see the connection in the student evolving into a disciplined student who is changed.

Finding 1 Summary. The data collected from the three instruments demonstrated teachers, administrators, and parents at Hillside High School believe there are overall benefits to engaging a school-based mentoring curriculum for at-risk students in an urban school district. The benefits are evident not only in discipline referrals and attendance, but also in the area of civic engagement and giving back to others. Responses from the parents, teachers, and administrators who participated in the survey, focus group, and interviews suggest there are overall benefits to engaging a school-based mentoring curriculum for at-risk youth in the Hillside School District.

Finding 2: Administrators, teachers, and parents perceive improved academic outcomes as a benefit of a school-based mentoring program.

Survey Results. On the teacher and parent survey, Question 7 asked if there has been academic improvement for the at-risk student engaged in the program. In response, 37.5% of the teachers and parents involved in the program strongly agreed, 25% agreed, and 37.5% disagreed. The survey results reveal a majority of respondents agreed academic outcomes of at-risk students improve as a result of a school-based mentoring program. In response to the question, "Have you observed an increase in the mentored students' attendance in your class?" 87.5% of participants expressed agreement (62.5 % strongly agreed and 25% agreed) while 12.5% disagreed. In response to Question 10, "Do you believe more schools should implement school-based mentoring programs?" 100% of participants expressed agreement (62.5% strongly agreed and 37.5% agreed).

Focus Group Results. The results of the survey were corroborated by comments made in the focus group by parents of students in the program. Respondent 3 stated:

> I would also say there are increased academic outcomes. The desire to want to participate and show up at school, show up for themselves because they know someone cares for them. This drives the academics, so that children will want to learn.

Respondent 5 added:

> Yes, I do believe the district cares for our at-risk students. From what I see, there is an increased desire to want to learn, to want to engage and to want to better themselves, how, whatever that means and whatever subject it may be, or just in school overall they can, they can see the improvements that they are making, even if it's small and with mentorship, those small achievements are recognized.

Adding to the conversation, Respondent 4 shared:

> I feel like the district is connected, and often times that is not the case. When it comes to our students, particularly the ones who are at-risk, I know for my son not having a man in the house is major, but now with this program there are those who can assist and watch over him.

> In discussing the value of a school-based mentoring program, parents identified the improvement of academic outcomes resulting from the program and acknowledged the district played a significant role in the encouragement of this particular program. Respondent 4 initiated the conversation by saying:

> There is just something to be said about school districts whose administrators do not care. Here in our district for the past five years we've been able to have a school-based

mentoring program. The administrators and those who make key decisions certainly helped to ensure that there will be some type of program for students who fall behind or have issues with academic achievement.

Respondent 1 agreed and added:

It's hard being a parent out here raising these kids by yourself. I know my taxes work for something and the one thing that I'm glad they're working to support this program. I don't know everything that goes into making it run, but I do know that my child has been made better for being a part of it. He finally raised his grades in math. That's an achievement I never thought he'd be able to do on his own, without a tutor. Now he has confidence in his performance in the classroom. So he doesn't mind being in school.

Interview Results. The responses generated in the one-on-one interviews regarding the improvement of academic outcomes were largely similar to those in the survey and the focus group discussions. Participant 2 shared:

I'm a firm believer that every child needs a champion. And relationships and environment often dictate how successful a child is. Usually, when kids are deemed at-risk, they've been disconnected somehow or another from the school. A lot of times. That's because, they have not found a connection to a caring adult who they feel can kind of talk to them about anything. So with this program, [students] address the academic issues they face, therefore helping them improve their academic success.

In the surveys, focus group, and interviews, the majority of participants concurred that in order to improve the academic outcomes, administrators in the school district should support a school-based mentoring program.

Finding 2 Summary. The data from the survey, focus group, and one-on-one interviews aligned to Research Question 1 suggested the majority of participants agreed that administrators, teachers, and parents view improved academic outcomes as a benefit of a school-based mentoring program. In order for districts to improve student academic outcomes, administrators must create supportive environments. The responses from teachers, parents, and administrators suggested the school-based mentoring program in the Hillside School District is effective in improving academic outcomes.

Research Question 2: What are the determining factors that make this program successful?

Finding 3: Teachers, administrators, and parents perceive a mentor, along with a structured leadership curriculum and regularly scheduled meeting times, are identifiable factors in making the program successful.

Survey Results. The survey results revealed teachers and parents believe there are determining factors that make a significant difference in the lives of these students and their families as well. In response to Question 2, "Do you agree with the determining factors that make this program successful?" 100% of the teacher participants expressed agreement (62.5% strongly agreed and 37.5% agreed). When asked, "Do you believe the curriculum provided has made a difference in the life of the student?" 37.5% strongly agreed, 37.5% agreed, and only 25% disagreed. Table 3 provides an overview of the data.

Table 3

Survey Results for Questions Aligned to Research Question 2: What are the determining factors that make this program successful?

Survey Question	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Do you agree with the determining factors that make this program successful?	62.5%	37.5%	0%	0%
Do you believe the curriculum provided has made a difference in the life of the student?	37.5%	37.5%	25%	0%
Do you believe the student's life has improved or changed significantly as a result of a school-based mentoring program?	37.5%	25%	37.5%	0%

Focus Group Results. Among the five participants in the focus group, there was strong consensus around the determining factors in a school-based mentoring program. At the end of the discussion, several points of view came to the forefront, which included but was not limited to discussing the features and elements making a school-based mentoring program successful. Respondent 3 shared:

I think the curriculum serves as an understanding that factors play a huge role in the program. I appreciate that it focuses on developing the child from different areas. Topics

such as conflict resolution, topics that focus on who you are as a person. Topics are

important. The curriculum is important, because it provides structure for the kids.

Respondent 5 agreed and added:

I believe another determining factor is the mentors. There is structure because of their

efforts. This was our first experience that we had with [the program], and when I tell you

awesome, awesome, it was awesome! I mean that it was just awesome!

Respondent 3 shared:

I agree the mentor selection process is important. It's important for the same reasons that

the other parent just mentioned, because you can't, not that you can't, but kids are very

smart and sometimes they're smarter than they like to be perceived to be, unfortunately.

And so if you have an adult who was like that child when they were a child, they may be

able to relate a little bit more and as far as the curriculum tying into that, they will be able

to recognize probably a little bit easier when a student is trying to manipulate the

situation and maybe not get all that they could get out of the program. That alone is a

powerful determining factor in the outcome of the student's life.

Respondent 4 added:

Another key factor for me as a parent is that my child has come out of this with a support

group. She entered into the program, as a lot of kids, feeling discouraged. Now she has

people surrounding her to help her on a regularly scheduled basis.

Throughout the focus group, the participants maintained that while it is important to engage a

school-based mentoring program, it must be taught by mentors who are familiar with the

curriculum that is being provided to the students. All four participants expressed agreement with

Respondent 4's perspective, and Respondent 5 said, "This program needs to be in every school in the country!"

Interview Results. Results from the one-on-one interviews were also consistent with the survey and focus group results relating to the determining factors contributing to a successful mentoring program. Each of the nine interviewees asserted their belief that there are determining factors that make a school-based mentoring program successful, particularly when engaging a virtual learning platform, as was necessary during the time of this study due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Participant 9 said:

> I feel like the program offers different lessons that really touch on different subjects.
> Students, and especially by students, mean in this world, and so it was definitely great
> seeing just the wide durations of subjects, not just math, not just science, not just English,
> but social interaction as well.

Participant 6 added:

> Being able to have a positive role model that [the students] can identify with, that has
> been through trauma that has been through oppressive situations and still was able to rise.
> This is an encouragement for that youth to want to also give their best and also be able to
> rise and possibly pay it forward and help someone else in the future. The mentors make a
> major difference in the lives of the child.

This thought was also expressed by Respondent 4, who explained, "I really do support mentoring programs within schools. I think they're very important and I think it gives opportunity and spaces for children who kind of feel excluded or ignored in regular classrooms." All nine participants expressed the understanding that there are determining factors that make a school-

based mentoring program successful. The engagement of a mentor is crucial for the program's success.

Finding 3 Summary. The survey, focus group, and one-on-one interview data relating to Research Question 2 confirmed there are determining factors that make a school-based mentoring program successful. Teachers, parents, and administrators believe a mentor in the students' life is an important factor. There was also a common belief among parents that this program is needed and should be shared with others, particularly those who have children with challenging learning obstacles. Responses to the survey, focus group, and one-on-one interviews verified there are identifiable factors that make a school-based mentoring program successful.

Research Question 3: What areas of a student's life improve or change significantly as a result of a school-based mentoring program?

Finding 4: Parents, teachers, and administrators perceive the school-based mentoring program to have a significant impact on a student's self-esteem and class participation.

Survey Results. The researcher sought to determine what areas of a student's life improve as a result of participating in a school-based mentoring program. In creating the survey, the researcher included questions to identify the areas of students' lives that improve or change as a result of engaging in such a program. This survey was administered to teachers and parents. In response to the question, "Have you noticed an improvement in the mentored students' self-esteem?" 56.3% strongly agreed and 43.8% agreed; no respondents disagreed or strongly disagreed. Therefore, parents and teachers administrators perceived the school-based mentoring program to have a significant impact on a student's self-esteem.

In response to the question, "Is doing well in school important to you?" 100% of the participants answered in strong agreement. Table 4 provides an overview of the data.

Table 4

Survey Results for Questions Aligned to Research Question 3: What areas of a student's life improve or change significantly as a result of a school-based mentoring program?

Survey Statement	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Have you observed an increase in the mentored students' class participation?	12.5%	50%	37.5%	0%
Have you observed an increase in the mentored students' attendance in your class?	25%	62.5%	12.5%	0%
Has there been academic improvement for the at-risk student engaged in the program?	37.5%	25%	37.5%	0%
Have you noticed an improvement in the mentored students' self esteem?	56.3%	43.8%	0%	0%

Teachers and parents perceive a school-based mentoring program has a significant impact on a student's life. They also strongly believed there are significant changes to the lives of at-risk students when a school-based mentoring program is engaged. Student class participation and students' self-esteem are areas that improve as a result of a school-based mentoring program.

Focus Group Results. The focus group generously offered their input centered around the school-based mentoring program and its significant impact on the lives of students. The parents in the focus group agreed that students' self-esteem and class participation improved as a result of participating in the program. Respondent 2 offered:

I will tell you that the consistent meetings that were held, I feel, provided a platform for students to connect and for students to identify with each other as someone who's struggling and can share those common struggles. I think that definitely served a purpose for their social and emotional well-being.

Respondent 3 shared:

I had an issue with my younger daughter, she attends the middle school. She had some poor self-esteem issues. Lacking the belief in herself to succeed and speak up. Well, the mentoring program had some of the high school females come over and work with my daughter and her friends, which I think was very, very helpful, because often times when you're hearing from your older peers, younger students are more [apt] to listen to them than they perhaps say they will to authority, for lack of a better word. She is now excited at participating in school functions, even though it is online. And overall she is now confident as a young lady. I'm so proud of her.

Respondent 1 agreed with Respondent 3, sharing:

With the school-based mentoring program, over time there is like an increased level of self-confidence, self-awareness, and even self-control for the children. And it just helps them, you know, hit those benchmarks as they're developing.

Respondent 4 said:

I would say the self-confidence that the students develop helps them to have a voice and to be able to communicate their needs. To be able to feel comfortable asking those questions that they need to ask in order to get a better understanding. So, when you have that confidence it's a natural self-esteem booster.

As the conversation ended, Respondent 3 shared:

One of the major benefits is just the ability to feel connected. I know for my son not having a man in the house is major. To have somebody that he can connect to is important for his self-esteem and school engagement. And I think that socially, that helps to lead to more, you know, educational success for him. So he is not feeling alone, and has somebody to talk to, that he can connect with in a way that he can't with me. You know, physically I'm a woman, there is only so far that I can take him.

Interview Results. The responses provided by the nine interviewees showed a major connection to the opinions revealed in the survey and focus groups. The majority of the nine participants affirmed that significant areas of the students' lives improve with a school-based mentoring program. When asked, "Are there self-esteem benefits for at-risk students?" Participant 5 commented:

Without a doubt, socially and behaviorally, students that prior to being in the program were engaged in, you know, bad behaviors in the classroom. Whether they were

90

disrespectful to the teachers, not showing up for class, getting into fights, not going to

class. That showcased a calling out for help. Now there is a change in class involvement

which shifts the paradigm for self-confidence. Yeah, it definitely has improved. Kids are

going to class, kids are taking [school] seriously.

Participant 3 said:

And that's the other thing you offer, support. You instill in these kids self-confidence.

And if you have self-confidence you can conquer the world.

Participant 2 shared:

I can tell you that on a positive note, our chronic absenteeism rate declined greatly,

whereas last year we were at 17%, which is over the state average of 14.2%. This year we

decreased down to 10%, and I definitely know that the mentoring program played a big

role in that upswing of class involvement.

When questioned about the changes in students' lives due to the program, all of the interviewees

acknowledged students' self-esteem and class participation as two major areas that have

improved as a result of a school-based mentoring program.

Finding 4 Summary. The survey, focus group, and one-on-one interview data that

correlates to Research Question 3 reflects that teachers, parents, and administrators perceive that

a school-based mentoring program significantly improves a student's life. Most expressed the

notion that a school-based mentoring program plays an important role in the life of the at-risk

student. The prevalent theme that resonated in the responses centered on the following areas of

significance: self-esteem and class participation.

Chapter Summary

The purpose of this study was to examine the impact of a school-based mentoring program for at-risk students in an urban school district. Several different methods of data collection were implemented for the study, which included a survey, a focus group, and nine one-on-one interviews. The data assembled from each of the instrumentation tools was thoroughly analyzed, coded, and put into themes that could identify and support the four key findings. Those who participated in the study included teachers, parents, and administrators. Three research questions were created to guide the study and to ensure the data was collected properly. This was necessary in order to arrive at legitimate conclusions. Four major findings were identified as a result of the study. Findings 1 and 2 answered Research Question 1, Finding 3 was relevant to Research Question 2, and Finding 4 connected to Research Question 3. The four findings are (1.) A majority of teachers, parents, and administrators at Hillside High School perceive stronger attendance and lower discipline referrals as benefits for at-risk students who are involved in a school-based mentoring program. (2.) Administrators, teachers, and parents perceive improved academic outcomes as a benefit of a school-based mentoring program. (3.) Teachers, administrators, and parents perceive that a mentor, along with a structured leadership curriculum and regularly scheduled meeting times, are identifiable factors in making the program successful. (4.) Parents, teachers, and administrators perceive the school-based mentoring program to have a significant impact on a student's self-esteem and class participation.

Chapter V will discuss interpretations and conclusions of each of the findings, in addition to providing recommendations and conclusions from the researcher, including recommended actions for the Hillside School District.

Chapter V

Findings, Discussions and Recommendations

Introduction

Throughout the years, the prevailing definition of and strategies for mentoring youth have

shifted. In the past, mentoring was largely dependent upon large groups and organizations, such

as The Boys and Girls Club, Big Brothers Big Sisters, and the United Way. These groups

provided, and still provide, services for students through an after-school program model and as

weekend service providers. Even faith-based groups attempted to create mentoring models to

assist youth, and government and local municipalities have also engaged in mentoring initiatives.

The main objective of these groups was to ensure the overall development and success of youth.

Over time, however, there has been a seismic repositioning of mentoring and its greater purpose

in the life of the at-risk student. The main focal point of mentoring in this view is centered upon

providing support to assist students in improving their academic outcomes and their behavior.

The concept of school-based mentoring heads toward a new model of engaging with youth,

particularly youth who are viewed as at-risk. This study specifically explored the impact of

school-based mentoring on at-risk students in an urban school district in Hillside, New Jersey.

The purpose of this study was to examine the impact of a school-based mentoring

program on at-risk students in an urban school district. The researcher sought to establish

whether teachers, parents, and school administrators believed a school-based mentoring program

was a benefit to at-risk students. Furthermore, the researcher aimed to assess whether the

program made changes in the life of the at-risk student. The researcher was confident a deeper

dive into the topic would produce findings to better inform the school district and other school

districts on the current status and future advancement school-based mentoring for at-risk students, in addition to contributing to the knowledge and research surrounding school-based mentoring.

The study was framed by the following three research questions:

1. What are the overall benefits for at-risk students who are involved in a school-based mentoring program?

2. What are the determining factors that make this program successful?

3. What areas of a student's life improve or change significantly as a result of a school-based mentoring program?

Organization of Chapter V

In this study, Chapter II shared a thorough review of scholarly literature and research on the topic of mentoring. Chapter III outlined how data was acquired to answer the three research questions. Three methods of data collection were used, including a survey of teachers and parents, a parent focus group, and one-on-one interviews with teachers and administrators. As a result of the quantitative and qualitative methods used in this mixed-methodology approach, didactic data was produced with statistical and exegetical components as supporting proof. Lastly, utilizing the process of triangulation, data was coded, analyzed, and reviewed to distinguish themes and identify answers to the three research questions. These methods allowed the researcher to draw conclusions pertinent to the three research questions.

The study conducted by the researcher examined the perceptions of teachers, parents, and administrators regarding a school-based mentoring program supporting at-risk students. Chapter IV presented the four findings exhibited in the study as related to the three research questions.

Chapter V will elaborate on the meaning of the four findings and the understanding and conclusions drawn from them. Recommendations in regards to future steps will also be presented. A summation of this action research study will close the chapter.

Interpretation of Findings

Research Question 1: What are the overall benefits for at-risk students who are involved in a school based mentoring program?

The first research question aimed to identify what teachers, parents, and administrators perceive to be the benefits of a school-based mentoring program. A survey was completed by parents and teachers to obtain data to answer the question. In addition, data was also acquired through the use of a parent focus group and nine one-on-one interviews with a combination of teachers and administrators.

Finding 1: A majority of teachers, parents and administrators at Hillside High School perceive stronger attendance and lower discipline referrals as benefits for at-risk students who are involved in a school-based mentoring program.

Despite the lack of prior research pertaining to K-12 student mentoring, almost every study of academic mentoring has cited positive effects with regard to mentees' achievements, self-concept, and aspirations (Reglin, 1998). More specifically, the literature suggests mentoring can be a potential intervention for many school-related challenges such as self-esteem, motivation, behavior, attendance, and academic achievement (Boyd et al., 1990; McPartland & Nettles, 1991; Taylor, 1993; Wiener & Mincy, 1993). The data collected from the three instruments demonstrated teachers, administrators, and parents at Hillside High School do believe there are overall benefits to engaging a school-based mentoring curriculum for at-risk

students in an urban school district. The benefits are evident not only in discipline referrals and attendance, but also in the area of civic engagement and giving back to others.

Responses from the parents, teachers, and administrators who participated in the survey, focus group, and interviews suggest there are overall benefits to engaging a school-based mentoring curriculum for at-risk youth in the Hillside School District. All five participants of the focus group, all nine interviewees, and 100% of survey respondents indicated there are overall benefits for students who are involved in a school-based mentoring program. There were no disagreements presented against this claim. The data revealed there are overall benefits to engaging a school-based mentoring curriculum for at-risk youth in the Hillside School District.

Though the results of this research illustrate there are overall benefits for students who are involved in a school-based mentoring program, prior research challenges this notion and requires these conclusions to be examined. For instance, The No Child Left Behind Act of 2002 had the intention of ensuring all educators had the necessary resources to achieve student success (Dee & Jacob, 2011). The legislation, however, is largely regarded as a failure. In fact it may have, unintentionally, increased what we now see as a larger disparity for at-risk students. This in turn affected in part the at-risk student demographic on a greater scale. Thereby, showing the importance of programs such as school-based mentoring to combat the incremental rise of at-risk student academic failure. One study of school-based mentoring programs found they lacked the consistency of the positive findings found in their community-based mentoring (CBM) counterparts (Karcher, 2008; Portwood & Ayers, 2005). It is important to note, however, some school-based mentoring programs do not have positive data results because they generally are not evidence based. Therefore reviews of many school-based mentoring programs are non-

existent due to lack of evidence-based research and most importantly, evaluation of school mentoring practices (Karcher, 2008; Portwood & Ayers, 2005). In light of this examination, the data taken from the three instruments support a school-based mentoring program for at-risk students. However, it is still necessary to identify any inconsistencies within the program.

After reviewing the survey responses, the focus group responses, and the one-on-one interviews, it is clear teachers, administrators, and parents believe there are overall benefits to engaging a school-based mentoring curriculum for at-risk students in the Hillside School District. Therefore, in order to produce evidential benefits for at-risk students, a school-based mentoring program must be in place and a part of the annual school year plan for the Hillside School District. Research indicates the school is the ideal setting for mentorship programs (Herrera & Karcher, 2013).

Finding 2: Administrators, teachers, and parents perceive improved academic outcomes as a benefit of a school-based mentoring program.

The data used to reinforce the second finding was drawn from the responses to the survey, the focus group, and the one-on-one interviews. Combining the data from these three instruments brought common theme to the forefront: teachers, parents, and administrators suggested the school-based mentoring program in the Hillside School District is effective in improving academic outcomes for at-risk youth attendees.

Hillside School District's teachers and parents indicated this belief in their responses to the teacher and parent survey. Question 7 on the survey asked if there had been academic improvement for the at-risk students engaged in the program. In response, 62.5% of the teachers and parents who responded to the survey strongly agreed. The survey results reveal a majority of

respondents agreed academic outcomes of at-risk students improve as a result of a school-based

mentoring program. The results of the survey were corroborated by comments made in the focus

group by parents of students in the program. One respondent said:

> I would also say there are increased academic outcomes. The desire to want to participate
>
> and show up at school, show up for themselves because they know someone cares for
>
> them. This drives the academics, so children will want to learn.

The teachers and administrators who participated in the one-on-one interviews also expressed

this sentiment. For example, one participant said:

> Usually, when kids are deemed at-risk, they've been disconnected somehow or another
>
> from the school. That's because, they have not found a connection to a caring adult who
>
> they feel can kind of talk to them about anything. So with this program, [students]
>
> address the academic issues they face, therefore helping them improve their academic
>
> success.

> The perceptions held by teachers, parents, and administrators that engagement of a

school-based mentoring program improves academic outcomes correlates to the research

conducted by authors Carla Herrera and Michael J. Karcher, presented in their chapter, "School-

Based Mentoring," in the *Handbook of Youth Mentoring*. Herrera and Karcher (2013) share:

> By engaging in academically focused activities with their mentees, school-based mentors
>
> can help improve academic performance for at-risk students directly (e.g., through
>
> homework completion) and also may focus discussions on school - including social and
>
> academic challenges in this context. Because many youth referred to school-based
>
> programs are struggling academically, this focus may be an important route through

which formal school-based mentoring programs work and improve academic outcomes.

(p 204).

In Mentoring In Schools: Making a Difference in Schools: The Big Brothers Big Sisters School-Based Mentoring Impact Study, Herrera, Grossman, Kauh, & McMaken, et al (2011) suggest

participation in school-based activities increases students' sense of school belonging and liking"

(p. 3). These changes may, in turn, lead to improved attendance and academic performance. This

finding is also aligned with data from a study of a school-based mentoring program called

Project RAISE, conducted by McPartland and Nettles (1991). The study found children who

enrolled in Project RAISE received better grades than children who were not participants. This

data indicates a mentor engaging with a student leads to higher academic performance.

School-based mentoring for at-risk students is centered upon student performance.

McDaniel and Yarbrough (2016) have defined school-based mentorship programs as programs in

which "mentors provide academic instruction and may include social skills instruction or other

nonacademic activities" (p. 2). They explain these programs differ from community-based

mentorship programs because the school-based mentors spend less time with the students, and

the meetings are held in an environment focused on academics. In addition, McDaniel and

Yarbrough (2016) suggest these relationships are crucial because they also help to improve the

student's other relationships in the school environment, such as with teachers and administrators.

These relationships are housed in a consistent curriculum and includes regularly scheduled

meeting times. Furthermore, when the relationship with the mentor is positive, the student may

also develop a more positive perception of the school environment and academic activities

(McDaniel & Yarbrough, 2016).

In order to eliminate the achievement gap and assist the at-risk students of the Hillside School District, they need exposure to a school-based mentoring option for academic improvement. Hillside School District teachers, parents and administrators identified how vested goals such as academic improvement are key to supporting students at-risk.

From Finding 2, two conclusions can be taken. As mentioned in Finding 1, the majority of teachers, parents, and administrators at Hillside High School perceive stronger attendance and lower discipline referrals as benefits for at-risk students who are involved in a school-based mentoring program, which leads to improved academic outcomes. Therefore, through an applied school-based mentoring program, academic outcomes for at-risk students are improved. A second conclusion can also be gleaned regarding assumption. It cannot be assumed that outcomes for the at-risk student will improve by engagement alone. The student must maintain consistency and stay engaged in the program. Through the school-based mentoring program, students are provided the opportunity for academic improvement and success. This needs to be clearly expressed not only from a district point of view, but also from a participant point of view as well.

Research Question 2: What are the determining factors that make this program successful?

Finding 3: Teachers, administrators, and parents perceive a mentor, along with a structured leadership curriculum and regularly scheduled meeting times, are identifiable factors in making the program successful.

Finding 3 was authenticated with data from all three instrumentation tools. Within the survey, focus group, and one-on-one interview data relating to Research Question 2, determining factors were identified that make a school-based mentoring program successful. In response to

survey Question 2, "Do you agree with the determining factors that make this program successful?" 100% of the teacher and parent participants expressed agreement; 62.5% strongly agreed and 37.5% agreed.

Results from the survey were consistent with the focus group and one-on-one interview results relating to the determining factors contributing to a successful mentoring program. Identifying and discussing those factors proved to be extremely important. Factors such as having a mentor, along with a structured leadership curriculum and regularly scheduled meeting times, were gleaned as identifiable factors in making the program successful. Qualifying statements included, "I think the curriculum serves as an understanding that factors play a huge role in the program. I appreciate that it focuses on developing the child from different areas."; "I believe another determining factor is the mentors. There is structure because of their efforts."; "I feel like the program offers different lessons that really touch on different subjects. We are all students, and by students I mean students of the world. And so it was definitely great seeing just the wide durations of subjects, not just math, not just science, not just English, but social interaction as well."; "Being able to have a positive role model that [the students] can identify with, that has been through trauma that has been through oppressive situations and still was able to rise. This is an encouragement for that youth to want to also give their best and also be able to rise and possibly pay it forward and help someone else in the future. The mentors make a major difference in the lives of the child."

The sentiments of the study were participants related to the existing research on the subject. For instance, the research has shown engaging a mentor in the life of an at-risk student can garner positive results for the mentee. One similar program with distinguished results is

101

Project 2000. Project 2000 was designed to target young African-American boys who would benefit from the opportunity to work with adult male mentors within the school setting (Holland, 1996). Project 2000 places emphasis on developing listening skills, self-control, commitment, and schoolwork. Holland's evaluation of the program determined the Project 2000 students had significantly higher grades and test scores than their peers when independent tests were computed to compare a control group of children at a comparable school to Project 2000 students. In another study, the Big Brothers Big Sisters of America program was tested for its impact on its mentees. Although not statistically significant, children with a mentor received better grades in school than the control group and were more likely to feel confident about their ability to complete their schoolwork. Children who had received a mentor were truant from school 52% fewer days than the control group (Grossman & Tierney, 1998).

In addition to the mentors themselves, additional factors may make a school-based mentoring program successful. Evidence found in prior research also points toward curriculum and meeting consistency. Specifically, Solomon et al. (1996) shared insight about the importance of curriculum and regularly scheduled meetings. To maintain direction, regularly scheduled mentoring meetings must be conducted with clear and concise expectations. There should be a curriculum in place. Also, opportunities for celebration and recognition, along with retention activities and field trips are vital for the program's success. Finally, program evaluation is necessary for a superior mentoring experience. The positive impacts of school-based mentoring potentially exist for all stakeholders involved in the process. Successful school-based mentoring programs can not only be advantageous to the mentees, but also to the entire school, by creating

social support networks that incorporate compassionate adults from the nearby community (Solomon et al., 1996).

Across all three data points in this study, teachers, administrators, and parents demonstrated they perceive a mentor, a structured curriculum, and regularly scheduled meeting times, are identifiable factors in making a school-based mentoring program successful and help at-risk students develop. The participants expressed the overarching belief that engagement with the program must occur frequently, not just once a month, or it will not have the impact needed to make a difference in the life of the student. Furthermore, the program must not be offered in a generic, hands-off, routine manner. Rather, it needs to be consistent and provided by a facilitator who has a relationship with the student as a mentor. To that end, 75% of survey respondents agreed with the question, "Do you believe the curriculum provided has made a difference in the life of the student?"

Finding 3 served to answer Research Question 2, "What are the determining factors that make this program successful?" The identifiable determining factors that make the school-based mentoring program in the Hillside School District successful are a mentor, a structured curriculum, and regularly scheduled meetings are key factors school-based mentoring program. There was also a common belief among teachers and parents that this program is needed and should be shared with others, particularly those who have children with challenging learning obstacles.

Research Question 3: What areas of a student's life improve or change significantly as a result of a school-based mentoring program?

The third research question was aimed at understanding the area(s) of a student's life that improve or change significantly as a result of engaging with a school-based mentoring program. A survey was completed by parents and teachers to obtain data to answer the question. In addition, data was acquired through the use of a parent focus group and nine one-on-one interviews with teachers and administrators.

Finding 4: Parents, teachers, and administrators perceive the school-based mentoring program to have a significant impact on a student's self-esteem and class participation.

King et al. (2002) conducted an analysis of a mentoring program focused on constructing relationships, improving self-esteem, creating goals, and offering academic support for students failing two or more subjects in the first quarter. The findings confirmed positive student connections with school and family are linked to improved student achievement, as 71% of the students who participated displayed improvement in their grades and a significant improvement in their self-esteem (King et al., 2002). In this study, the data collected from the parent and teacher survey, the parent focus group, and the teacher and administrator one-on-one interviews corroborated this finding. Through all three research instruments, respondents indicated a school-based mentoring program plays an important role in the life of the at-risk student. The prevalent theme that resonated in the responses centered on the following areas of significance: self-esteem and class participation.

In the survey, the researcher specifically constructed questions to identify the areas of students' lives that improve or change as a result of engaging in such a program. This survey was administered to teachers and parents. In response to the question, "Have you noticed an

improvement in the mentored students' self-esteem?" 56.3% strongly agreed and 43.8% agreed; no respondents disagreed or strongly disagreed. This confirms parents and teachers perceive a school-based mentoring program has a significant impact on a student's self-esteem. In addition, the parent focus group responses and teacher and administrator interviews point toward a similar theme in regards to a student's self-esteem and class participation, revealing students' lives have improved significantly due to engagement with a school-based mentoring program.

Several studies suggest that youth may benefit from school-based mentoring. For example, studies report benefits in academic performance (Curtis & Hansen-Schwoebel, 1999; Diversi & Mecham, 2005; Hansen, 2001, 2002) and self-esteem (Curtis & Hansen-Schwoebel, 1999; Karcher et al., 2006). Studies also suggest participation in school-based activities increases a student's sense of school belonging and liking (Eccles and Barber, 1999; Grossman et al., 2002). These changes may, in turn, lead to more consistent attendance, improved academic performance, higher self-esteem, and greater class participation. Also, because parents' involvement in children's schooling leads to more positive outcomes (Henderson & Mapp, 2002), a mentor's involvement or a school-based mentoring program in the child's school life could similarly be linked with benefits (Grolnick & Slowiaczek, 1994). As mentoring programs have increasingly staked their claim across the nation, a focus on the assessment and evaluation of these programs has brought to bear an investigation into the valued results of the programming. These investigations have determined that at-risk student engagement with a school-based mentoring program leads to a significant improvement in a student's life. Despite the limitation of literature pertaining to K-12 student mentoring, almost every study of academic mentoring has cited positive effects with regard to mentees' achievements, self-concept, and

aspirations (Reglin, 1998). More specifically, the literature suggests mentoring represents a potential intervention for many students' school-related challenges, such as self-esteem, motivation, behavior, class participation, and academic achievement (Boyd et al., 1990; McPartland & Nettles, 1991; Taylor, 1993; Wiener & Mincy, 1993).

Parents, teachers, and administrators in the Hillside School District shared the specific areas in which they noticed improvement in the mentees in the program. The parent focus group generously offered their input centered around the school-based mentoring program and its significant impact on the lives of their children. The parents agreed that students' self-esteem and class participation improved as a result of the program. For example. Respondent 3 stated:

> I had an issue with my younger daughter, she attends the middle school. She had some poor self-esteem issues. Lacking the belief in herself to succeed and speak up. She is now excited at participating in school functions, even though it is online. And overall she is now confident as a young lady. I'm so proud of her.

Respondent 1 concurred with Respondent 3, sharing, "With the school-based mentoring program, over time there is like an increased level of self-confidence, self-awareness, and even self-control for the children." Respondent 4 chimed in, "I would say the self-confidence that the students develop helps them to have a voice and to be able to communicate their needs." An almost identical line of thinking became quite apparent in the one-on-one interviews. When questioned about the changes in students' lives due to the program, all of the interviewees acknowledged students' self-esteem and class participation as two major areas of improvement as a result of the school-based mentoring program. Interviewee 2 commented:

I can tell you that on a positive note, our chronic absenteeism rate declined greatly, whereas last year we were at 17%, which is over the state average of 14.2%. This year we decreased down to 10%, and I definitely know that the mentoring program played a big role in that upswing of class involvement.

The main conclusion taken from Finding 4 is that a school-based mentoring program plays a significant role in the life of the at-risk student. The data collected from the three instruments reveal a prevalent theme that resonates in the responses centered on the following areas of significance: self-esteem and class participation.

Limitations of the Study

According to Bloomberg and Volpe (2019), regardless of how carefully you plan a study, there are always some limitations. Limitations of a study are defined as the characteristics of a specific research design that impact the interpretation of research findings and place parameters on the transferability of results (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2019). This study was limited by the following two factors: (1) The data was collected during the time of remote learning in the fall of 2020 and spring of 2021, due to the Covid-19 pandemic. As a result of this unfortunate situation, the focus groups and one-on-one interviews could not take place in person and were administered via Zoom, a video meeting platform. Having to rely on technology was a challenge. Poor Wi-Fi accessibility along with delays and several other technological challenges arose, impacted the fluidity of conversation. This also could have led to irritation among the participants, who may have desired to hurry along with the interview, rather than taking their time to be patiently heard and (2) The data was collected at the end of the school year. The Covid-19 pandemic made it challenging to assemble the key participants for the study. Toward

the end of the school year, all parties involved, from parents to teachers and administrators, were experiencing a "burn-out" due to quarantining all year long. A feeling of isolation and fatigue had prevailed and therefore securing participation in the study and collecting data was difficult.

Recommendations for Future Research

This research investigation focused on the impact of a school-based mentoring program on at-risk students in an urban school district during a virtual learning environment. Specifically, it examined the benefits and the key factors that lead to improvement in a student's life as a result of participating in a school-based mentoring program.

The four findings assembled from the three data sources corroborate prior research regarding school-based mentoring and the significant areas of improvement identified in the lives of at-risk students. The research presented in Chapter II identified the historical issue of at-risk students, defined what it means to be at risk, assessed the causes and of effects of being at-risk, and investigated previous solutions attempted, including school-based mentoring programs. This study was consistent with other studies on the topic of school-based mentoring. It provides additional evidence regarding how a school-based mentoring program for at-risk students in an urban school district is necessary and should be offered to improve student outcomes, decrease discipline referrals, and improve emotional confidence. With the bevy of prior research, along with the corroboration from parents, teachers and administrators in this study who believed a school-based mentoring program for at-risk students should be provided in the Hillside School District, the researcher has the following recommendations, for further research.

As a researcher my first recommendation is to conduct a study. Further research shows a study should be considered to examine the impact of school-based mentoring on future outcomes (such as college enrollment, job placement, etc.). A second recommendation would be a study to is to determine the factors influencing successful mentors. A third recommendation is to conduct a similar study with a larger sample in a traditional school setting not impacted by the Covid - 19 pandemic.

A fourth recommendation should examine the impact of factors such as a program study focused on the impact of a school-based mentoring program and did not examine other key factors, such as program resources, implementation processes, or program duration. Research into these elements of school-based mentoring is recommended. Lastly, additional research should consider whether a school-based mentoring program is necessary for at-risk students, identify the best process to ensure the program is implemented for an appropriate duration of time, and investigate possibilities for starting school-based mentoring programs at an earlier grade level. This continued research would assist the Hillside School District and the overall community as a whole to determine how to successfully assist at-risk students within the Hillside School District.

Recommendations for Practice

As a result of these findings, the researcher puts forth the following recommendations. In order to support the continuation of this particular school-based mentoring program, it was important to obtain data which affirmed the baseline perceptions of the parents, teachers, and administrators. It is critical to formulate a comprehensive plan for program success. First, there has to be an assessment and identification of the at-risk student. Next there should be an

identification of the student's schedule and who their teachers will be. A relationship between the student, parents, and teachers should be fostered for the benefit of the student. Next teachers should be informed and educated about the program and the intended outcome to aid the at-risk student. Finally, the mentor is added to the equation, thus setting the platform for the student to benefit significantly. Moving forward, Hillside School District and other urban school districts must reexamine their Closing The Achievement Gap (CTAG) plan (a plan to eliminate performance disparities in student achievement) and see it provides a multiyear school-based mentoring program to support at-risk students. The district needs to continue to provide the program with guaranteed consistency, to cultivate success for at-risk students from the K-12 grade levels respectively. It is important to engage students at an early age, as opposed to waiting until high school. It cannot be assumed everyone will be agreeable to the notion of a long-term plan for at-risk students, but it is necessary and now proven with data to support the need to close the disparity gaps for this group of students. In closing, Hillside High School and the Hillside School District's parents, teachers, and administrators were clear in their support of this important program. Their participation in the program for the past five years shows the value of engaging in supporting these students. However, to amend the annual repositioning of the program and the issues of the revolving district leadership and board member subjugation and approval, it is recommended steps be taken to create a more solid long term-plan for the program in the district. Implementing a long term seamless plan will lead to a seismic shift in the lives of at-risk students and their families. From this study, the researcher has learned the Hillside School District parents, teachers, and administrators understand the impact of a school-based mentoring

program for at-risk students and are committed to seeing it developed more fully and creating a long-lasting effort toward its success.

Summary and Conclusion

The word mentor and the concept of mentoring has existed for centuries. The etymology of the word "mentor" is from the Greek root menos, which means strength. It is not just any regular strength, it is heroic strength. When Athena the goddess of intelligence comes forth in the form of Mentor to help Telemachus, Odysseus's son, she is providing an intellectual heroic strength to someone who is in need of intellectual and emotional empowerment. In an article from The Atlantic entitled, "*The Odyssey*'s Millennia-Old Model of Mentorship", author and reporter B.R.J. O'Donnell, interviews classicist Gary Nagy and he states:

> I would say it's made pretty clear in *The Odyssey* that if there hadn't been this kind of intervention by Athena, Telemachus would have been assassinated. And even if Odysseus made a successful homecoming, it would have been bad, because his son would have been dead. So this intervention really was life-and-death. There is no uncertainty— Telemachus would be doomed without Mentor.

As we examine the issues facing at-risk students, we can see how the role of "mentor" is more important to the student in academic peril. To be clear, at-risk students are doomed without some type of mentor. It is imperative we take a deeper look into how to implement the appropriate programs to assist these students. Although the research about school-based mentoring is limited, there has been growth in the reputable reporting of different school-based mentoring programs. This study confirmed parents, teachers, and administrators perceive a significant impact on at-risk students at Hillside High School who have participated in a school-based mentoring

program. In addition, the study affirmed a majority of teachers, parents, and administrators at Hillside High School perceive stronger attendance, lower discipline referrals, improved self-esteem, and increased class participation as benefits for at-risk students who are involved in the school-based mentoring program. They witnessed improved academic outcomes as a result of the school-based mentoring program, and identified a mentor, along with a structured leadership curriculum and regularly scheduled meeting times, as factors that make the program successful.

As this study comes to a conclusion, the researcher takes delight in knowing the time and effort through the years has culminated in positive outcomes. It is clear the parents, teachers, and administrators of Hillside School District concur with the existing research regarding school-based mentoring. The researcher also takes comfort in knowing the at-risk student is now offered an option to improve their academic and social circumstances.

APPENDIX

INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD
IRB SUBMISSION FORM
You may not start the project until you receive IRB approval

INSTRUCTIONS
You should download this form and insert your responses directly below each question. Email the completed form with all necessary attachments in **a single Word document or a PDF**. The IRB will return submissions that have multiple attachments. Send your submission at least two weeks before an IRB meeting to irb@cse.edu. See the website for IRB meeting dates. If you have any questions, contact Dr. Michele Yurecko, myurecko@steu.edu , 973-290-4036.

PROPOSED TITLE
Title of the proposed research: *The impact and effect of a school-based mentoring program on students at-risk (in the Virtual Learning Environment of an Urban School District)*

DATES	
Date of Application: May 14, 2021	Approximate starting and ending dates for this research project: June-September, 2021

RESEARCHER INFORMATION		
Name/Affiliation of researcher 1: David Jefferson Jr, Ed. D. candidate: Ed. Leadership, Saint Elizabeth University	Phone: H: 908-429-7953 M: 267-265-2217	email: djefferson@steu.edu
Name/Affiliation of researcher 2:	Phone:	email:
Name/Affiliation of advisor 1: Dr. Keith Neigel	Phone: 973-290-4397	email: kneigel@steu.edu
Name/Affiliation of advisor 2: Dr. Joseph Ciccone	Phone: 973-290-4383	email: jciccone@steu.edu
Is this a student project? Yes: Undergraduate Master's **Doctoral** Thesis/Dissertation		No:

CERTIFICATION TO PROTECT HUMAN SUBJECTS AGREEMENT

By submitting this form, you agree to comply with the SEU IRB policy for reporting adverse events and unanticipated problems and events within three business days. To report to the IRB, use Form 10 (Adverse Events).

Adverse events include but are not limited to death, injury, individuals' loss of income, incurring expenses related to the research, and/or experiencing anxiety as a result of the research.

Unanticipated problems could include having a breach of security of your data. For example, if you misplaced your raw data or had your computer hacked, you might encounter a security breach.

Unanticipated events might include change in principal investigators or study site; additional time needed to complete your research; and/or any other alteration of the study subsequent to the IRB's approval of the initial proposal.

1. Have all investigators identified above completed **the CITI training** program? The certification is only good for three years. Please make sure your certification is up to date.

   Yes

   a. If No, complete the training program immediately and provide a copy of the training certificate to the IRB.

Note that the IRB will not approve this study until it receives all certifications.

PROTECTED POPULATIONS

2. If your research involves individuals/records from your place of employment:
   Employer: n/a
   Job title:
   Phone:
   email:
   Relationship among participants, researcher, and employer:

3. Indicate with an X if you will collect data from or about any of the following protected populations:
   Minors
   Prisoners
   Pregnant women
   Fetuses
   Institutionalized/diagnosed individuals (e.g. mentally disabled individuals residing in facilities or who exhibit psychiatric, cognitive, or developmental disorders)

   a. If you answered yes, explain how you will protect this group: n/a

For example, if you are collecting data from children, you must explain how you will obtain parental permission. The IRB recognizes that in some schools, parents give permission for their children to participate in surveys upon enrolling their student.

If this situation applies to your research project, you must explain.

For additional requirements regarding these categories of protected populations, consult the SEU IRB User's Guidebook.

PURPOSE OF STUDY

Do not use pseudonyms. Note: IRB proposals are confidential. You may decide to use pseudonyms for your final report. Please use lay language.

4. State briefly (less than 100 words) the purpose of the intended research. Please include:

The purpose of my intended research is to determine the impact and effect a school-based mentoring curriculum has on at risk youth in an urban high school during a virtual instructional environment.

    a. What is to be learned?
The objective of my research study is to determine parents', teachers' and administrators' attitudes and perceptions of the school-based mentoring initiative in an urban school district and how it affects student outcomes.
    b. What problems are addressed?
The areas of inquiry pertain to the parents', teachers' and administrators attitudes and perceptions of the pedagogical impact of school-based mentoring for students at-risk, particularly in the current educational climate of the COVID-19 crisis.

    c. What are the specific objectives (or research questions)?

        1. What are the overall benefits for students' at-risk who are involved in a school-based mentoring program?

        2. What are the determining factors that make this program successful?

        3. What areas of a student life improve or change significantly as a result of a school-based mentoring program?

SAMPLING PROCEDURE

5. Describe in detail the **method** and **rationale** for selecting study participants:

Through the use of action research, the researcher sought to examine whether or not a school-based mentoring curriculum was linked to student outcomes for at-risk students. The intention of the Ready Set Grow Academy (RSGA) mentoring program is to utilize strategic interventions to maximize positive youth outcomes. This is done through a series of core curriculum, focused on: setting personal goals, understanding what type of learner you are, applying to college, understanding what G.P.A. means, and the keys to success as a student. For this study, several different metrics were used. This study employed the varying methods of surveys, interviews and focus groups. This study used purposive sampling. As such, the researcher selected the parents, teachers and faculty/administration to be sampled via an online survey, seven participants for teacher survey, seven for the parents survey, five for the parent focus groups and four in regards to the faculty/admin and five faculty and teacher interview participants. These methods were utilized to provide a better understanding of the effect of the curricula on key faculty and district administration, teachers and parents of the students involved in the program. Creswell (2016) describes validity in that the research findings are accurate and plausible and further expresses the idea that validity expresses the accuracy of the account of the research participants (p. 191). Beyond that, Creswell states how proper triangulation and auditing of research is essential to validity in purposive sampling. This researcher sought a broad representation of the parents', teachers' and key faculty to express those views through purposive sampling. The only criteria for participation beyond that is the participants' enthusiasm, passion and desire for the subject material and the outcomes it presents.

115

a. State the number of people from whom you plan to collect data for each data source:

The researcher plans to administer a survey to 7 parents and 7 teachers of students in the program. The superintendent of the school district, the board president of the school district, the principal and vice principal of the high school along with faculty and teachers will be interviewed. And finally, a focus group of 5 parents. The researcher will be sending an invitation and accepting volunteers/participants on a first-come, first-served basis for participation in the survey and interviews. The only criteria for participation is the participants' enthusiasm, passion and desire for the subject material.

6. If you are using a purposive (or judgment) sample, explain why these individuals are appropriate for your study:

7. Describe if and how participants will be compensated:
There will be no compensation for participation in this study (other than my sincerest thanks and appreciation).

8. Please report everything that you will tell participants about the study prior to participating in the research:
Please refer to the following appendices:
A Introduction to Research Study, p. 13
B Invitation to Complete Anonymous Survey, p. 15
D Introduction, Invitation & Consent to Participate in Focus Group, p. 16
F Introduction, Invitation & Consent to Participate in One-To-One Interviews, p. 19

Attach copies of all recruitment flyers and emails **as appendices**

INTRODUCTION OF STUDY TO PARTICIPANTS

9. For any interview, focus group or in-person survey that you will use, include the statement or "script" that you will use to introduce participants to the study:

Please refer to the following appendices:
E Focus Group Script and Questions, p. 18
G Interview Script and Questions, p. 21

Form 2 "Adult Consent Form Introduction" is a sample script you can use to model what you will tell participants.
(**Attach as an appendix**).

10. Describe in detail how you will collect data:

The study will utilize a research design defined as mixed methods. It will examine at-risk students and their involvement in a school-based mentoring program. It will include a survey as a quantitative instrument and focus groups and interviews as means to collect qualitative data. This was intended to help the researcher to understand the impact and effect of the school-based mentoring curriculum on at-risk students. The use of triangulation of data was critical. Creswell (2016) described triangulation as "an effective method and checking the accuracy of the interpretations the researcher deduces" (p.). In addition, triangulation is seen as a systematic crosschecking of information and conclusions, according to Bloomberg and Volpe (2019). In an effort to design a reputable study, the researcher utilized multiple methods of data collection as well as a triangulation approach. This allows for the greatest triangulation of data, thereby providing the most accurate representation of the research and reliability of the data. According to Bloomberg and Volpe (2019), "the clear description of the research sample, setting, methods, limitations, delimitations and acknowledgment of trustworthiness issues provides readers with a basis for accepting (or not accepting) the conclusions and recommendations that follows" (p. 12).

The researcher developed and utilized an online survey to be sent to the parents and teachers. The survey consists of quantitative elements and permits the researcher to take a deeper dive into the topic, in order to develop a more comprehensive understanding by which to engage in the qualitative portion of the study. A link to the survey will be emailed to the parents, along with the select group of teaching staff who work with the students. In addition there will be a written statement as to the importance of the survey, the anonymity of the survey results, and the understanding that this is a voluntary process that can be terminated at any point, and which requires consent on their part. The only criterion for participation in the survey is a desire to participate by the parents, teachers and administrative staff consenting to complete the survey. The district is currently engaged in a fully remote educational model due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Therefore all interaction will occur virtually. The focus group for this research study will consist of 5 parents who are engaged in a district led parental engagement group. Additionally, 7 parents and 7 teachers of the at-risk students will be surveyed through a google survey platform. The 4 district administrators and 5 teachers will be interviewed administrators will be interviewed one-on-one through the virtual platform. The researcher will be sending an invitation to teachers and parents and accepting participants on a first-come, first-served basis for focus groups and interviews. The participants will be asked a series of research questions, developed by the researcher and vetted for content validity by a cohort of trusted research colleagues. The focus group and interview members will be provided information regarding the nature of the study and asked to provide signed consent of participation, emphasis drawn to the notion that contributors could withdraw from participation at any time. Participants will also be informed the focus group and interview process could take anywhere from sixty to ninety minutes to complete. It is important to note, the participants in this study merely share the common condition of their willingness to discuss the school-based mentoring initiative, as it relates to their experiences and perceptions. At this point, though in-person focus groups and interviews were expected. Due to the ongoing COVID-19 crisis, focus groups and interviews must take place via video conferencing in order to maintain proper social distancing and not violate current group size gathering restrictions enacted by New Jersey executive order.

To reiterate, the researcher will assure participants that information shared during the focus groups and one-on-one interview process will be kept strictly confidential. Each participant will be provided with an informed consent agreement to sign forms prior to participating in this study. Each interview will be preceded by a reiteration of the research study, its purpose, assurance of confidentiality, a letter of informed consent to be signed which includes a right to refusal at any time, and a written presentation of the interview structure. Participant protections will be established through identity confidentiality, disclosure of voluntary participation and the potential risks and benefits associated with this study, and signed informed consent (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2016). Google Meet focus groups and Interviews will be digitally recorded (audio and video) for the purpose of eventual transcription. The researcher will inform all interview participants that interviews will be transcribed by the company Verbal Ink, ultimately resulting in the erasure of the digital audio recording once completed with its use. All focus group members and interview participants will be assigned a numerical identifier within the context of this study to protect individual identity. Interviews will be conducted on a one-to-one basis and aim to be 16 to 32 minutes in length. For a full list of the interview questions, refer to the Appendix. Interviews were audio- recorded for purposes of ensuring accurate transcription at a later time. The questions were developed by the research team with the goal of exploring youth participants' experiences of participating in the Ready Set Grow Academy mentoring program.

a. Location(s) where you will conduct your research:

The survey will be disseminated through the electronic platform, Google Forms. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic and current social distancing requirements, I will conduct my focus groups and interviews remotely, using Google Meets/Zoom.

b. Type of institution(s):

documentation that you have permission to collect data from off-campus sites, if applicable:

Email:
Fax:

c.   Provide documentation that you have permission to collect data from off-campus sites, if applicable.

(Attach as an appendix)

d.   Clarify your role in the organization where research is being conducted. Discuss any plans to protect the research from possible bias related to your position. *At the outset of working to obtain my doctoral degree, I was an owner and operator of a Local Education Agency (LEA) that administered a school-based mentoring curriculum in the school district. My curiosity to discover the impact and effect a school-based mentoring curriculum has on students at-risk in the urban setting stems from my own engagement, observations and concerns regarding its implementation in several other school districts for the benefit of improving student outcomes. Currently my LEA is working in the district. I am recognized as a community shareholder who resides in the community and feel as though the study is worthy of continued exploration. My hope is to introduce information and data that will aid in supporting students and families who are in need of academic support and social guidance.* It is also to assist the district with sound research on the topic. *The researcher acknowledges that he may influence data collection, data interpretation, and reporting resultant of personal bias due to work history as an LEA operator, as well as potentially collecting data from colleagues. To further limit personal bias, the researcher will maintain a reflection journal to record thoughts, feelings, uncertainties, values, beliefs, and assumptions that emerge throughout the research process.*

INSTRUMENTATION
11.   Provide all interview questions and focus group guides; questionnaires; rating/observation forms, and **attach copies as appendices**: *Please see the following attached appendices: A Introduction to Research Study, p. 13 B Invitation to Complete Anonymous Survey, p. 14 C Research Survey, p. 15 D Introduction, Invitation & Consent to Participate in Focus Group, p. 16 E Focus Group Script and Questions, p. 18 F Introduction, Invitation & Consent to Participate in One-To-One Interviews, p. 19 G Interview Script and Questions, p. 21*
12.   Are you using data collection/consent forms in a language other than English?   Yes   **No X**   a.   If yes, please explain how you have ensured for the accuracy of the translations: The IRB prefers that researchers use the "back-to-back" method where one person translates from English and another person uses the foreign translation and re-translates back into English. If you are having difficulty finding an independent party to assist in the back-to-back process, contact the IRB.

13. Do you plan to transcribe interviews/focus group meetings?
    Yes X
    No

    a. If yes, please explain the relationship of the transcriber to you and include a signed confidentiality agreement:

The researcher will conduct transcription of one-to-one interviews and focus groups. The focus group and interviews will be audio and video recorded by the researcher in Google Meet and transcribed verbatim by an outside company, Verbal Ink, and confidentiality is assured by the mutual consent of a non-disclosure agreement between Verbal Ink and the researcher
Please refer to Appendix K, Agreement Between Researcher and Transcriber, Verbal Ink

See IRB website for a model confidentiality agreement.

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14. Does the proposed research involve deception, e.g., through provision of misinformation, withholding information, etc.?
    Yes
    No   X

    a. If yes, explain why it is necessary to involve deception(s) in the research:

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15. Provide a full account of the debriefing procedures to be followed, if applicable:

There will be no debriefing after the survey, focus group or interviews.

If you plan to debrief, attach a copy of the written debriefing procedures.

PROTECTING HUMAN SUBJECTS

16. All studies have the potential to place individual participants in physical, legal, economic, social and/or psychological risk (or discomfort). Most social/behavioral research studies pose no greater than minimal risk. In a minimal risk study, participants respond to questions or engage in activities that are consistent with routine daily life. Keep in mind that what you think is routine may be different from what your participants think is routine. For this reason, it is important to consider the perspective of potential research participants.

    Minimal risk X

    More than minimal risk

a. If your study poses no greater than minimal risk, clearly explain how the information you plan to ask participants and/or or the activities you plan for them are consistent with their routine experiences in their workplace/other situations:

Study participants will not be placed in any physical, legal, economic, social, or psychological risk through participation in this study. Individuals selected to participate in this study will participate in surveys, as well as discussions regarding school practices. Interview and focus groups will take place on a secure Google Meet session to ensure privacy, due to current COVID-19 restrictions.

There is, however, minimal risk associated with the focus group process. The researcher will state the following prior to the beginning of each focus group: "During our discussion, we can use first names. However, no names or personally identifiable information will be included in reporting these findings. Please refrain from using last names or any other identifiers during our conversation to further protect confidentiality." While the researcher will request that last names and other identifiers be redacted from focus group discussion, it is possible that participants may, unintentionally, share this information during the course of the focus group dialogue and breach confidentiality.

b. If your study poses more than minimal risk, clearly explain how you will minimize risk:

17. In a few sentences, please describe the benefits of the research, both to the participant and to society:

Students who are at-risk increasingly become a major concern and strain on society and community as a whole. The benefits of the research and data gathered as a result of this study, would continue to help hone and shape school-based mentoring initiatives in school districts. This study will serve as an understanding of the need and desire to operate a school-based mentoring program.

18. Explain how any possible risks that may be involved in the research are justified by the potential benefits resulting from the research even though the risks may be minimal:

Study participants will not be placed in any physical, legal, economic, social, or psychological risk through participation in this study. No identifying demographic information will be gathered at any point during the research study.

While the researcher will request that last names and other identifiers be redacted from focus group discussion and will assign random numbers to participants when reporting data, it is still possible that participants may, unintentionally, share this information during the course of the focus group dialogue and breach confidentiality.

As school-based mentoring becomes a more prevalent means of instruction for students at-risk, particularly during this challenging time in the world, the benefits of the information gathered as a result of this study outweigh the potential risks associated with a small, though possible, breach of individual confidentiality.

19. Explain how you will report findings so that no individual can be identified:

The names and any identifying information, known only to the researcher, of all study participants will be closely protected. None of the survey, focus group, or interview questions require the use or submission of any demographic identifiers, including the participants' gender, age, content area, grade level, years of educational experience or departmental assignment. The survey will be completed anonymously through the use of Google Forms where no Internet identifiers or IP tracking data will be gathered. The focus group and interviews will be audio and video recorded by the researcher in Google Meet and transcribed verbatim by an outside company, Verbal Ink, and confidentiality is assured by the mutual consent of a non-disclosure agreement between Verbal Ink and the researcher. The content of those recordings, as well as any survey data or transcriptions, will be stored on a secured, password protected portable hard drive, which will be decommissioned from use and stored in a locked file cabinet, location of which is known only to the researcher.

Further, study participants will be assigned random numbers to assist in confidentiality during the research reporting. All focus groups and interviews will be conducted in secure Google Meet sessions, to account for all COVID-19 safety protocols. The safety, health and security of the participants personal information is of the utmost importance to the researcher conducting this study.

20. Will you conduct:

    Interviews/Focus Groups
    Anonymous Surveys

Please complete either question 21 *or* 22

21. If Interviews/Focus groups/Face to Face Survey Administration/Archival Data,

   a.   If you will interview/conduct a focus group with the research participants, you cannot say that this data collection is anonymous because you know the participants' identities

As the researcher will conduct the focus groups and one-to-one interviews, anonymity is not possible with these methods. Focus groups and interviews for this study are, however, confidential, as explained in #19 and 21c.

   b.   You must explain how you will preserve confidentiality by specifying how you will protect participants' privacy in reporting research findings. For example, you might use pseudonyms and report findings according to general themes so that no participant's comments can be attributed to him or her:

The names and any identifying information, known only to the researcher, of all study participants will be closely protected. All participants will be assigned a numerical identifier that will maintain individual confidentiality. The list of participant names will be separated from the data itself. Due to the limited number of participants, no identifiable information will be used. None of the survey, focus group, or interview questions require the use or submission of any demographic identifiers, including the participants' gender, age, content area, grade level, years of educational experience or departmental assignment. The survey will be completed anonymously through the use of Google Forms, where no Internet identifiers or IP tracking data will be gathered. The focus group and interviews will be audio and video recorded by the researcher in Google Meet and transcribed verbatim by an outside company, Verbal Ink, and confidentiality is assured by the mutual consent of a non-disclosure agreement between Verbal Ink and the researcher. The content of those recordings, as well as any survey data or transcriptions, will be stored on a secured, password protected portable hard drive, which will be decommissioned from use and stored in a locked file cabinet, location of which is known only to the researcher. Per federal regulations, the researcher will maintain signed informed consent form for three years, following the completion of the study, and the remaining documents and materials will be destroyed at the conclusion of the study.

   c.   If you are conducting observations of individuals, your data collection is not anonymous. Here you must explain how you will present findings so that no individual can be identified.

   d.   Give specific examples of how you will ensure that readers will not be likely to identify interviewees and focus group members:

Focus group and interview responses will be presented in the research findings through a numerical identifier assigned to the participant. The identities of all participants will remain confidential, as explained in #18 and #19C.

   e.   If you are using archival data with identifying information about individuals, explain whether you know the individuals' identity and how you will protect their confidentiality:

Students data will be reviewed in relation to their academic and behavioral standing. We will protect the individuals identity with coding and anonymous name identifier.

22. If Anonymous Surveys,

   a.   If you will administer anonymous surveys (either online or in a public area or large staff meeting), you must explain how you will present findings so that no participant can be identified:

The survey will be administered anonymously through Google Forms. The IP (Internet Protocol) function will be turned off, which will make identifying participants impossible. The content of any survey data, will be stored on a secured, password protected portable hard drive, which will be decommissioned from use and stored in a locked file cabinet, location of which is known only to the researcher

   b.   If you are using online surveys, you must state that you will not collect IP addresses:

The survey will be administered anonymously through Google Forms. The IP (Internet Protocol) function will be turned off, which will make identifying participants impossible.

23. Explain how your analysis of survey results by demographic variables will protect confidentiality:

Survey, focus group, and interview responses will be presented in the research findings through a numerical identifier assigned to the participant. Due to the limited number of participants, no identifiable information will be used. None of the survey, focus group, or interview questions require the use or submission of any demographic identifiers, including the participants' gender, age, content area, grade level, years of educational experience or departmental assignment. The survey will be completed anonymously through the use of Google Forms, where no Internet identifiers or IP tracking data will be gathered. The identities of all participants will remain confidential, as explained in #19 and #21C.

For example, if your study site employed fewer than ten male nurses, your survey to nurses cannot ask respondents' gender, because if you analyzed survey results by gender, readers might be able to determine which male nurses responded in a certain way. Similarly, if only one or two teachers had doctoral degrees, a question about educational level would have to say "Masters or higher" rather than parse out master's degree and doctoral degree.

24. Explain how you will withhold demographic breakdowns if the number of individuals in the target population (not the number of respondents) is small (e.g. less than 10):

Survey, focus group, and interview responses will be presented in the research findings through a numerical identifier assigned to the participant. Due to the limited number of participants, no identifiable information will be used. None of the survey, focus group, or interview questions require the use or submission of any demographic identifiers, including the participants' gender, age, content area, grade level, years of educational experience or departmental assignment. The survey will be completed anonymously through the use of Google Forms, where no Internet identifiers or IP tracking data will be gathered. The identities of all participants will remain confidential, as explained in #19 and #21C.

INFORMED CONSENT AND/OR ASSENT

25. Do you plan to obtain signed consent or assent from any study participants?
      Yes
      No
   a.   If you plan to use a consent or assent form, please complete the appropriate template on the IRB website and attach a copy for IRB review. Within the consent template, explain what individuals will do to participate in the study, e.g. participate in a one-hour interview/agree to be observed/agree to be recorded. **Attach the appropriate consent/assent forms as appendices.**
	b. If not, please explain why:

DATA STORAGE

All data must be stored securely and be accessible only to members of the research team certified to work with human subjects. In addition, signed Consent Forms must be stored securely and separately from completed questionnaires and the data and any key used to specify subjects with their study number.

Please respond to the following questions.

26. Describe the procedures you will use to secure your data during the course of your study:

The survey will be completed anonymously through the use of Google Forms, where no Internet identifiers or IP tracking data will be gathered. The focus group and interviews will be audio and video recorded by the researcher in Google Meet and transcribed verbatim by an outside company, Verbal Ink, and confidentiality is assured by the mutual consent of a non-disclosure agreement between Verbal Ink and the researcher. The content of those recordings, as well as any survey data or transcriptions, will be stored on a secured, password protected portable hard drive, which will be decommissioned from use and stored in a locked file cabinet, location of which is known only to the researcher. Per federal regulations, the researcher will maintain signed informed consent form for three years, following the completion of the study, to be stored in a small fireproof safe, the location of which will only be known to the researcher.

(E.g. locked files, pass-word protection)

27. Explain how you will arrange for secure storage of consent forms separately from all other study materials:

Per federal regulations, the researcher will maintain signed informed consent form for three years, following the completion of the study, to be stored in a small fireproof safe, the location of which will only be known to the researcher.

28. Explain who will have access to these materials
No one will have access to these materials beyond the researcher himself.

29. Describe your plan for disposing or storing your data after you have concluded your study:

Upon completion of the study, all raw data will be shredded. All digitally recorded material collected by the researcher will be deleted when transcription is complete. All survey data will be deleted from the researcher's secured, password protected portable hard drive using a digital file shredding protocol to ensure irretrievability. The hard drive will further be reformatted to complete the digital wipe of data.

The IRB does not require that materials be destroyed within a specific period; the IRB wants to know how the researcher(s) will dispose of raw data in a responsible manner so that participants' identities are protected.

124

APPENDIX A
INTRODUCTION TO RESEARCH STUDY

Dear Colleagues,

As many of you know, I am pursuing my doctoral degree in educational leadership at the Saint Elizabeth University, located in Morristown, NJ. Part of my degree requirement is to complete a doctoral dissertation. The purpose of this dissertation research study is to understand the impact and effect of a school-based mentoring program on students at-risk (in the Virtual Learning Environment of an Urban School District). A review of the literature reveals a burgeoning body of research identifying the need to continue to hone and refine best practices for implementing school-based mentoring initiatives, particularly now, in a fully remote instructional setting. Considering this, the researcher will examine:

1. What are the overall benefits for students at-risk who are involved in a school-based mentoring program?

2. What are the determining factors that make this program successful?

3. What areas of a student life improve or change significantly as a result of a school-based mentoring program?

To gather this information, I will administer an anonymous online survey, as well as conduct focus groups and one-to-one interviews. Individual names and any identifiable data will not be used in reporting the findings. In the case where specific examples are provided, participants will be randomly issued numbers. This study is being conducted independently and exclusively from any and all school districts, so your participation does not tie you in any way to your place of work. Please note that participation in this study is strictly voluntary, non-evaluative, and your names and any identifiable information will not be used in reporting the results of this study. Also, participants in this study may withdraw consent and discontinue participation at any time without penalty and participants may decline to answer any question.

Over the next few days, I will be sending you a link to participate in an online, anonymous, survey. Some of you will then receive an invitation to participate in a confidential focus group or interview session. I will be conducting all focus groups and one-on-one interviews.

If you have any questions, please feel free to contact me at djefferson@steu.edu or 267-265-2217. If you have further questions regarding your rights as a study participant, you may contact Dr. Michele Yurecko, the Chair of the Institutional Review Board at Saint Elizabeth University at (973) 290-4036.

Thank you for your consideration.
David Jefferson Jr
Researcher
Candidate for Doctor of Education, Saint Elizabeth University

TITLE OF RESEARCH: *The impact and effect of a school-based mentoring program on students at-risk (in the Virtual Learning Environment of an Urban School District).*

RESEARCHER: *David Jefferson Jr; Doctoral Candidate, Saint Elizabeth University; This study is in partial fulfillment of the requirements to obtain the Doctor of Education degree.*

Dear Prospective Participant,

As many of you know, I am pursuing my doctoral degree in educational leadership at the Saint Elizabeth University, located in Morristown, NJ. Part of my degree requirement is to complete a doctoral dissertation. The purpose of this dissertation research study is to understand the impact and effect of a school-based mentoring program on students at-risk (in the Virtual Learning Environment of an Urban School District). A review of the literature reveals a burgeoning body of research identifying the need to continue to hone and refine best practices for implementing instruction through school-based mentoring initiatives, particularly now, in a fully remote instructional setting. Considering this, the researcher will examine:

      1. What are the overall benefits for students at-risk who are involved in a school-based mentoring program?

      2. What are the determining factors that make this program successful?

      3. What areas of a student life improve or change significantly as a result of a school-based mentoring program?

This is an invitation for you to participate in a confidential online survey that will support me in my efforts of collecting information to assist me in the completion of my doctoral dissertation. Please note that participation in this study is strictly voluntary, non-evaluative, and your names and any identifiable information will not be used in reporting the results of this study. Also, participants in this study may withdraw consent and discontinue participation at any time without penalty and participants may decline to answer any question. Those taking part in the survey will be anonymous, as the Internet Protocol (IP) address of the participant will not be collected by the researcher. Therefore, it will be impossible to identify respondents.

By completing this survey, you are consenting to participate in this research study.

As the researcher, I will be the only one with access to the results of this survey. Survey results will be deleted upon the completion and approval of this dissertation. Results will only be used for analysis as it relates to the dissertation topic.

If you have any questions, please feel free to contact me at djefferson@steu.edu or 267-265-2217. If you have further questions regarding your rights as a study participant, you may contact Dr. Michele Yurecko, the Chair of the Institutional Review Board at Saint Elizabeth University at (973) 290-4036.

Thank you for your consideration.
David Jefferson Jr
Researcher
Candidate for Doctor of Education, Saint Elizabeth University

RESEARCH QUESTIONS (The questionnaire is broken down into two parts: Teachers Survey and Parents/Guardians Survey. The research questions are presented to anchor the survey)	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Agree
What are the overall benefits for students at-risk who are involved in a school-based mentoring program? *What are the determining factors that make this program successful?* *What areas of student life change or improve significantly as a result of a school-based mentoring program?*				
Teacher Survey				
Would you say there are overall benefits for students who are involved in a school-based mentoring program?				
Do you agree with the determining factors that make this program successful?				
Do you believe the student's life has improved or changed significantly as a result of a school-based mentoring program?				
Have you observed an increase in the mentored students' attendance in your class?				
Have you observed an increase in the mentored students' class participation?				
Do you believe the curriculum provided has made a difference in the life of the student?				
Has there been academic improvement for the at-risk student engaged in the program?				
Overall all has the student shown appreciation for the program and increased communication with you about it and or the topics covered?				
Has the program helped you as a teacher in any way, shape or form in working with the student?				
Do you believe more schools should implement school-based mentoring programs?				

RESEARCH QUESTIONS (The questionnaire is broken down into two parts: Teachers Survey and Parents/Guardians Survey. The research questions are presented to anchor the survey) What are the overall benefits for students at-risk who are involved in a school-based mentoring program? What are the determining factors that make this program successful? What areas of student life change or improve significantly as a result of a school-based mentoring program?	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Agree
Parents/Guardians				
Have you noticed an improvement in your child's self esteem?				
Is your child's G.P.A as you would like it to be?				
Is doing well in school important to you?				
Is doing well in school important to your child?				
Do you believe your child's teacher(s) want them to do well in school?				
Do you believe a mentoring program is important for your child during school hours?				
Do you believe your child's mentor is interested in seeing your child succeed?				
Do you want your child to go to college or secondary school?				
Does your child want to go to college or secondary school?				
Do you believe the Ready Set Grow Academy School-based Mentoring Program has had a significant impact on your child?				
Do you believe there are benefits from your child being part of the Ready Set Grow Academy school-based mentoring program?				
Do you believe there are determining factors from your child being part of the Ready Set Grow Academy school-based mentoring program?				

TITLE OF RESEARCH: TITLE OF RESEARCH: *The impact and effect of a school-based mentoring program on students at-risk (in the Virtual Learning Environment of an Urban School District).*

RESEARCHER: *David Jefferson Jr; Doctoral Candidate, Saint Elizabeth University; This study is in partial fulfillment of the requirements to obtain the Doctor of Education degree.*

Dear Prospective Participant,

As many of you know, I am pursuing my doctoral degree in educational leadership at the Saint Elizabeth University, located in Morristown, NJ. Part of my degree requirement is to complete a doctoral dissertation. The purpose of this dissertation research study is to understand the impact and effect of a school-based mentoring program on students at-risk (in the Virtual Learning Environment of an Urban School District). A review of the literature reveals a burgeoning body of research identifying the need to continue to hone and refine best practices for implementing a school-based mentoring initiative, particularly now, in a fully remote instructional setting. Considering this, the researcher will examine:

      1. What are the overall benefits for students at-risk who are involved in a school-based mentoring program?

      2. What are the determining factors that make this program successful?

      3. What areas of a student life improve or change significantly as a result of a school-based mentoring program?

This is an invitation for you to participate in a focus group interview that will support me in my efforts of collecting information to assist me in the completion of my doctoral dissertation. Please note that participation in this study is strictly voluntary, non-evaluative, and your names and any identifiable information will not be used in reporting the results of this study. Also, participants in this study may withdraw consent and discontinue participation at any time without penalty and participants may decline to answer any question.

The focus group interview will be conducted and digitally recorded, both audio and video, that will be used to transcribe the interview, by the company, Verbal Ink. All individual identifiers will be redacted from the transcription and only I will have access to the transcripts. The transcripts from the interview will be completely confidential. All recordings will be deleted upon the completion of the transcription process.

Focus group interviews will take place in the following locations/format: Google Meet, due to the COVID-19 pandemic and the need to accommodate the rules of social distancing. Every effort will be made to provide a time that is convenient and meets the needs of your schedule. It is estimated that the focus group interview will last approximately 60 minutes.

Please initial to give your consent to be audio/video recorded through Google Meet. _____

Do you wish to be interviewed? _____Yes _____No

I hereby give my consent to be the subject of your research and understand that there is an expectation of confidentiality regarding the conversation in the focus group meeting. Therefore, I agree not to discuss the focus group meeting after the session. By signing this agreement, I understand that the researcher does not expect any foreseeable risks to me. There is no plan to reimburse me for any costs I might incur as a result of participating in this study.
I hereby give my consent to be the subject of your research.

Print Name: _____

Signature: _____ Date: _____

If you have any questions, please feel free to contact me at lmuller@steu.edu or 551-775-2244. If you have further questions regarding your rights as a study participant, you may contact Dr. Michele Yurecko, the Chair of the Institutional Review Board at Saint Elizabeth University at (973) 290-4036.

Thank you for your consideration.
David Jefferson Jr
Researcher
Candidate for Doctor of Education, Saint Elizabeth University

Hi and thank you for agreeing to meet with me today to discuss your experiences, attitudes and perceptions of a school-based mentoring initiative in the virtual learning environment of an urban school district. The purpose of this dissertation research study is to understand the impact and effect of a school-based mentoring program on students at-risk (in the Virtual Learning Environment of an Urban School District).

I will ask you questions about your attitudes and perceptions, the challenges teachers experience, and the instructional and supportive best-practices as these relate to the use of a school-based mentoring initiative. There is no right or wrong answer and please feel free to share all of your thoughts. During our discussion, we can use first names. However, no names or personally identifiable information will be included in reporting these findings. Please refrain from using last names or any other identifiers during our conversation to further protect confidentiality. Your participation is voluntary, and you can withdraw from the interview at any time.

I will be utilizing the record feature of the Google Meet session for use in transcription. Verbal Ink will conduct the transcription and I will be the only one who has access to it. The digital recording will be deleted once transcription is complete and the transcribed focus group session will be stored on a password protected hard drive locked in a filing cabinet.

May I record the session?

Do you have any questions? May we begin?

       1. What are the overall benefits for students at-risk who are involved in a school-based mentoring program?

       2. What are the determining factors that make this program successful?

       3. What areas of a student life improve or change significantly as a result of a school-based mentoring program?

Research Question 1
What are the overall benefits for students at risk who are involved in a school-based mentoring program?
What are the academic benefits? Please explain and provides some examples
Is there a significant difference in the attendance rate of the students who participated in the mentoring program from the spring semester of the previous year to the spring semester of the current year?
Is there a significant difference in the reading and math grades from the students after participating in the school-based mentoring program?
Is there a significant difference in the number of discipline referrals of the students involved in the mentoring relationships strengthened?
Have you observed an increase in the mentored students' class participation?
What are some of the behavioral or social benefits? Please explain and provide some examples?
What are some of the attitudinal benefits? Please explain and provide some examples

What are the overall benefits for students at risk who are involved in a school-based mentoring program?

Research Question 2
What are the determining factors that make this program successful?
What factors make this program successful?
How critical is the selection of a mentor? Why?
How important is the mentor-student relationship? Why? Provide some examples.
How important is the curriculum? Please explain and provide some examples.
In your mind, what is the most important aspect of this program?
What would you recommend to make this program more successful?

Research Question 3
What areas of a student life improve or change significantly as a result of a school-based mentoring program?
Have you observed any changes in students' expectations? Do they set higher goals for themselves? Please explain and provide examples.
Have you observed any changes in students' attitudes towards school? Their engagement in class and school? Please explain and provide examples.
Have you observed any changes in students' feelings of self-esteem or self-worth? Please explain and provide some examples.
Have you observed any changes in students' interaction with teachers? Other students?
Has the program helped you as a teacher in any way, shape or form in working with the student? If so, how? Examples?

TITLE OF RESEARCH: *The impact and effect of a school-based mentoring program on students at-risk (in the Virtual Learning Environment of an Urban School District).*

RESEARCHER: *David Jefferson Jr; Doctoral Candidate, Saint Elizabeth University; This study is in partial fulfillment of the requirements to obtain the Doctor of Education degree.*

Dear Prospective Participant,

As many of you know, I am pursuing my doctoral degree in educational leadership at the Saint Elizabeth University, located in Morristown, NJ. Part of my degree requirement is to complete a doctoral dissertation. The purpose of this dissertation research study is to understand the impact and effect of a school-based mentoring program on students at-risk (in the Virtual Learning Environment of an Urban School District). A review of the literature reveals a burgeoning body of research identifying the need to continue to hone and refine best practices for implementing instruction through school-based mentoring initiatives, particularly now, in a fully remote instructional setting. Considering this, the researcher will examine:

• What are the overall benefits for students at-risk who are involved in a school-based mentoring program?

• What are the determining factors that make this program successful?

• What areas of a student life improve or change significantly as a result of a school-based mentoring program?

This is an invitation for you to participate in a one-on-one interview that will support me in my efforts of collecting information to assist me in the completion of my doctoral dissertation. Please note that participation in this study is strictly voluntary, non-evaluative, and your names and any identifiable information will not be used in reporting the results of this study. Also, participants in this study may withdraw consent and discontinue participation at any time without penalty and participants may decline to answer any question.

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Do you wish to be interviewed? _____Yes _____No

I hereby give my consent to be the subject of your research and understand that there is an expectation of confidentiality regarding the conversation in the interview meeting. Therefore, I agree not to discuss the interview meeting after the session. By signing this agreement, I understand that the researcher does not expect any foreseeable risks to me. There is no plan to reimburse me for any costs I might incur as a result of participating in this study.
I hereby give my consent to be the subject of your research.

Print Name: _____

Signature: _____ Date: _____

If you have any questions, please feel free to contact me at lmuller@steu.edu or 551-775-2244. If you have further questions regarding your rights as a study participant, you may contact Dr. Michele Yurecko, the Chair of the Institutional Review Board at Saint Elizabeth University at (973) 290-4036.

Thank you for your consideration.
David Jefferson Jr
Researcher

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I will ask you questions about your attitudes and perceptions, the challenges teachers experience, and the instructional and supportive best-practices as these relate to the use of instructional technology in your teaching pedagogy. There is no right or wrong answer and please feel free to share all of your thoughts. During our discussion, we can use first names. However, no names or personally identifiable information will be included in reporting these findings. Please refrain from using last names or any other identifiers during our conversation to further protect confidentiality. Your participation is voluntary, and you can withdraw from the interview at any time.

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Is there a significant difference in the number of discipline referrals of the students involved in the mentoring relationships strengthened?
Have you observed an increase in the mentored students' class participation?
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What are some of the attitudinal benefits? Please explain and provide some examples

What are the overall benefits for students at risk who are involved in a school-based mentoring program?

Research Question 2
What are the determining factors that make this program successful?
What factors make this program successful?
How critical is the selection of a mentor? Why?
How important is the mentor-student relationship? Why? Provide some examples.
How important is the curriculum? Please explain and provide some examples.
In your mind, what is the most important aspect of this program?
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Have you observed any changes in students' expectations? Do they set higher goals for themselves? Please explain and provide examples.
Have you observed any changes in students' attitudes towards school? Their engagement in class and school? Please explain and provide examples.
Have you observed any changes in students' feelings of self-esteem or self-worth? Please explain and provide some examples.
Have you observed any changes in students' interaction with teachers? Other students?
Has the program helped you as a teacher in any way, shape or form in working with the student? If so, how? Examples?

Is there anything further you would like to share regarding your perceptions of the use of a school-based mentoring program?

Please keep this sheet in case you have any questions about this research project.

1. TITLE OF RESEARCH: *The impact and effect of a school-based mentoring program on students at-risk (in the Virtual Learning Environment of an Urban School District)*

1. For answers to any questions you may have about this research, contact:

    RESEARCHER: *David Jefferson Jr; Doctoral Candidate, Saint Elizabeth University; This study is in partial fulfillment of the requirements to obtain the Doctor of Education degree.*

    Email: djefferson@steu.edu
    Mobile: 267-265-2217

2. For answers to any questions you may have about your rights as a research subject, contact:

    > Dr. Michele Yurecko
    > Chair, Institutional Review Board
    > Saint Elizabeth University
    > 2 Convent Road
    > Morristown, New Jersey 07960
    > 973-290-4036
    > irb@steu.edu

Agreement Between the Researcher and Transcriber

VERBAL INK CONFIDENTIALITY AGREEMENT Date: "Verbal Ink": Outskirts, Inc. dba Verbal Ink "Client". This Confidentiality Agreement ("Agreement") is entered into by and between Client and Verbal Ink as of the above date in connection with discussions between the parties with respect to Verbal
Ink performing transcription services for Client ("Services"). Whereas Client intends to provide Verbal Ink with certain confidential and proprietary information regarding Client and/or its business for transcription purposes and Verbal Ink intends to maintain the confidentiality of such information, now, therefore, in consideration of the disclosure of such information, and other good and valuable consideration, the parties agree as follows:

1. The parties acknowledge that related to any Services provided by Verbal Ink to Client, Client may make available to Verbal Ink certain information and materials: (i) in writing, by email, by audio tape or other tangible electronic storage medium clearly marked and identified by Client as "Confidential" or "Proprietary" or (ii) that, by the nature of the information and circumstances surrounding their disclosure ought to, in good faith, be treated as proprietary and/or confidential (hereafter referred to as "Confidential Information"). Excluded from Confidential Information are: (i) information which is known to Verbal Ink prior to entering into this Agreement, (ii) information which becomes known to Verbal Ink from a third party who is not subject to a confidentiality agreement with Client, (iii) information which is required to be disclosed as a matter of law, and (iv) information which is generally known to the public.

2. Verbal Ink acknowledges that all Confidential Information furnished to it is considered proprietary and is a matter of strict confidentiality. Verbal Ink further acknowledges that the unauthorized use or disclosure of any Confidential Information may cause irreparable harm to Client. Accordingly, Verbal Ink agrees that Client will be entitled to seek equitable relief including injunctive relief and specific performance, in addition to all other remedies available at law or in equity for any breach of this Agreement. In the event of any dispute under this Agreement, each party and its managers', officers', directors', executives', owners', members', shareholders', employees', affiliates', agents', advisors', representatives', and, in the case of Verbal Ink, its transcriptionists, ("Representatives") monetary liability to the other party and its Representatives for all claims related to this Agreement will be limited to direct and proven damages. Neither party (nor its Representatives) will be liable for or entitled to any indirect, incidental, reliance, special, punitive, exemplary or consequential damages arising out of its performance or nonperformance under this Agreement, whether or not they had been advised of the possibility of such damages. In the event of any dispute related to this Agreement, each party (and its Representatives) shall pay its own attorneys' fees and other litigation costs.

3. Verbal Ink agrees that, except to its Representatives to the extent necessary to permit them to assist in the performance of the Services, it will not distribute, disclose or convey to third parties any of Client's Confidential Information without Client's prior written consent. All transcriptionists working with Verbal Ink are subject to and must pass criminal background checks before starting work with Verbal Ink. Confidential Information shall not be distributed, disclosed or conveyed to any Representative unless such Representative is advised of this Agreement and agrees to be subject to the terms hereof or a similar agreement.

4. Verbal Ink agrees that all Confidential Information received from Client shall at all times remain the sole property of Client and upon completion of the Services shall be either: (i) returned to Client, if Client has made such prior written request, or (ii) deleted from Verbal Ink's files such destruction certified to the client. Notwithstanding the immediately preceding sentence, Verbal Ink may (but shall not be obligated to) retain one copy of Confidential Information in its files for legal or regulatory requirements only (subject to the confidentiality requirements hereof). No rights or licenses, express or implied, are granted by Client to Verbal Ink under any patents, copyrights, trademarks, service marks, or trade secrets owned by Client as a result of, or related to, this Agreement.

5. This Agreement is effective upon the date first written above. This Agreement shall remain in full force and effect for three (3) years from the above date.

6. This Agreement is binding on the parties and their successors and assigns, and its provisions may only be waived by written agreement of the parties. This is a binding agreement that contains all of the agreements and understandings of the parties and any amendments to this Agreement must be in writing. This Agreement and any claim related directly or indirectly to this Agreement shall be governed and construed in accordance with the laws of the State of California (without giving regard to the conflicts of law provisions thereof). No such claim shall be commenced, prosecuted or continued in any forum other than the courts of the State of California located in the City and County of Los Angeles or in the United States District Court for the Central District of California, and each of the parties hereby submits to the jurisdiction of such courts. Each of the parties hereby waives on behalf of itself and its Representatives, successors and assigns any and all right to argue that the choice of forum provision is or has become unreasonable in any legal proceeding. This Agreement may be executed in counterparts by facsimile.

READ, AGREED AND ACCEPTED By: _____

Its: _____ Outskirts, Inc. dba Verbal Ink   By: _____

HILLSIDE PUBLIC SCHOOLS
New Pathways, New Possibilities
2020-2021 School Year

Mr. A. Robert Gregory
Interim Superintendent of Schools

March 29, 2021

To Joseph Ciccone, Ed.D.,

This letter is regarding David Jefferson Jr. Mr. Jefferson is currently an Executive Director leading a school-based mentoring initiative for students "at-risk" with the Board of Education of the Hillside Public Schools located in Hillside Township. Mr. Jefferson is in the process of completing Saint Elizabeth University's Ed. D. program.

This letter is to grant permission for Mr. Jefferson to continue his research dissertation within our school district. We understand that he will be conducting surveys, focus groups and interviews with the parents, teachers, and administrators in our district.

Please feel free to contact my office should you have further inquiries on this matter.

Sincerely,

A. Robert Gregory

Superintendent

Office of the Superintendent, Hillside Public Schools
195 Virginia Street, Hillside, NJ 07205-2798
Ph: 908/352-7664 x 6400, Fax: 908/282-5831; RGregory@hillsidek12.org

138

From the desk of : David Jefferson Jr, M.Div.

267-265-2217   djefferson@steu.edu   10 Dipaolo Court, Raritan, NJ 08869

March 9, 2021

Mr. A. Robert Gregory
Superintendent of Schools
Township of Hillside Public Schools
195 Virginia Street
Hillside, NJ 07205

Dear Mr. Gregory,

As you know, I am an Ed.D. candidate at the Saint Elizabeth University in Morristown, New Jersey. The purpose of my action research is to examine the attitudes and perceptions parents, teachers and administrators have concerning the Ready Set Grow Academy school-based mentoring initiative in your school district. Currently, I serve as a community shareholder and researcher in the district and I would appreciate being allowed the opportunity to conduct my research here. Hillside has always been special to me, and will always hold a dear place in my heart. Further, school-based mentoring has been one of my passions that I have worked diligently on in the district for the past six years.

I am requesting your permission to conduct a survey on this topic as well as interview and focus group discussions with our RSGA parents, teachers and administrators in your district provided that my dissertation proposal is approved by the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at the Saint Elizabeth University.

The IRB requires that your approval be sent to me on official letterhead from your district. As per IRB requirements, please state specifically in your letter of approval that you give your permission for me to give the surveys and conduct interviews with parents, teachers and administrators in your district, if the dissertation proposal is approved by the Institutional Review Board at the Saint Elizabeth University.

If possible please return your signed letter of approval to me by April 1, 2021. I will happily come pick it up from the board office. Your time and consideration in this matter is greatly appreciate it.

Sincerely yours,

David Jefferson Jr, M.Div

Executive Director

Ready Set Grow Academy

Letter of Request

COLLABORATIVE INSTITUTIONAL TRAINING INITIATIVE (CITI PROGRAM)
COMPLETION REPORT - PART 1 OF 2
COURSEWORK REQUIREMENTS*

* NOTE: Scores on this Requirements Report reflect quiz completions at the time all requirements for the course were met. See list below for details. See separate Transcript Report for more recent quiz scores, including those on optional (supplemental) course elements.

- **Name:**   David Jefferson Jr (ID: 9584352)
- **Institution Affiliation:** Saint Elizabeth University (ID: 1365)
- **Institution Email:**   djefferson@steu.edu
- **Institution Unit:**   Education
- **Phone:**   2672652217

- **Curriculum Group:**   Social & Behavioral Research - Basic/Refresher
- **Course Learner Group:**   Same as Curriculum Group
- **Stage:**   Stage 1 - Basic Course

- **Record ID:**   39036122
- **Completion Date:**   19-Oct-2020
- **Expiration Date:**   19-Oct-2023
- **Minimum Passing:**   80
- **Reported Score*:**   93

REQUIRED AND ELECTIVE MODULES ONLY	DATE COMPLETED	SCORE
Belmont Report and Its Principles (ID: 1127)	19-Oct-2020	3/3 (100%)
Students in Research (ID: 1321)	19-Oct-2020	4/5 (80%)
History and Ethical Principles - SBE (ID: 490)	19-Oct-2020	3/5 (60%)
Defining Research with Human Subjects - SBE (ID: 491)	19-Oct-2020	4/5 (80%)
The Federal Regulations - SBE (ID: 502)	19-Oct-2020	5/5 (100%)
Assessing Risk - SBE (ID: 503)	19-Oct-2020	5/5 (100%)
Informed Consent - SBE (ID: 504)	19-Oct-2020	5/5 (100%)
Privacy and Confidentiality - SBE (ID: 505)	19-Oct-2020	5/5 (100%)
Research with Prisoners - SBE (ID: 506)	19-Oct-2020	5/5 (100%)
Research with Children - SBE (ID: 507)	19-Oct-2020	4/5 (80%)
Research in Public Elementary and Secondary Schools - SBE (ID: 508)	19-Oct-2020	5/5 (100%)
International Research - SBE (ID: 509)	19-Oct-2020	5/5 (100%)
Internet-Based Research - SBE (ID: 510)	19-Oct-2020	5/5 (100%)
Vulnerable Subjects - Research Involving Workers/Employees (ID: 483)	19-Oct-2020	4/4 (100%)

For this Report to be valid, the learner identified above must have had a valid affiliation with the CITI Program subscribing institution identified above or have been a paid Independent Learner.

Verify at: www.citiprogram.org/verify/?kf52660f3-b1c4-4862-9268-0bfa65bc9623-39036122

Collaborative Institutional Training Initiative (CITI Program)
Email: support@citiprogram.org
Phone: 888-529-5929
Web: https://www.citiprogram.org

COLLABORATIVE INSTITUTIONAL TRAINING INITIATIVE (CITI PROGRAM)

COMPLETION REPORT - PART 2 OF 2
COURSEWORK TRANSCRIPT**

** NOTE: Scores on this <u>Transcript Report</u> reflect the most current quiz completions, including quizzes on optional (supplemental) elements of the course. See list below for details. See separate Requirements Report for the reported scores at the time all requirements for the course were met.

- **Name:** David Jefferson Jr (ID: 9584352)
- **Institution Affiliation:** Saint Elizabeth University (ID: 1365)
- **Institution Email:** djefferson@steu.edu
- **Institution Unit:** Education
- **Phone:** 2672652217

- **Curriculum Group:** Social & Behavioral Research - Basic/Refresher
- **Course Learner Group:** Same as Curriculum Group
- **Stage:** Stage 1 - Basic Course

- **Record ID:** 39036122
- **Report Date:** 25-Nov-2020
- **Current Score**:** 93

REQUIRED, ELECTIVE, AND SUPPLEMENTAL MODULES	MOST RECENT	SCORE
Students in Research (ID: 1321)	19-Oct-2020	4/5 (80%)
Defining Research with Human Subjects - SBE (ID: 491)	19-Oct-2020	4/5 (80%)
The Federal Regulations - SBE (ID: 502)	19-Oct-2020	5/5 (100%)
Belmont Report and Its Principles (ID: 1127)	19-Oct-2020	3/3 (100%)
Assessing Risk - SBE (ID: 503)	19-Oct-2020	5/5 (100%)
Informed Consent - SBE (ID: 504)	19-Oct-2020	5/5 (100%)
Privacy and Confidentiality - SBE (ID: 505)	19-Oct-2020	5/5 (100%)
Research with Prisoners - SBE (ID: 506)	19-Oct-2020	5/5 (100%)
Research with Children - SBE (ID: 507)	19-Oct-2020	4/5 (80%)
Research in Public Elementary and Secondary Schools - SBE (ID: 508)	19-Oct-2020	5/5 (100%)
International Research - SBE (ID: 509)	19-Oct-2020	5/5 (100%)
Internet-Based Research - SBE (ID: 510)	19-Oct-2020	5/5 (100%)
History and Ethical Principles - SBE (ID: 490)	19-Oct-2020	3/5 (60%)
Vulnerable Subjects - Research Involving Workers/Employees (ID: 483)	19-Oct-2020	4/4 (100%)

For this Report to be valid, the learner identified above must have had a valid affiliation with the CITI Program subscribing institution identified above or have been a paid Independent Learner.

Verify at: www.citiprogram.org/verify/?kf52660f3-b1c4-4862-9268-0bfa65bc9623-39036122

Collaborative Institutional Training Initiative (CITI Program)
Email: support@citiprogram.org
Phone: 888-529-5929
Web: https://www.citiprogram.org

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