
Effective Practices and Principles of an Internal College Readiness Program Based on Literature, School Staff and Student Perceptions: A Mixed Methods Analysis

Khrysta A. Evans

Mentor: Dr. Wallace Southerland III, Instructor, Research Methods and Associate Director, McNair Scholars Program and Faculty Member, Walden University

Abstract

This triangulated mixed methods study explores the effective elements of college readiness programs by analyzing the existing literature and also school staff and alumni perceptions of their experiences in an internal college readiness program. This study's significance lays in its ability to answer the call for empirical research on the specific factors of these programs that promote successful college access.

While existing studies effectively incorporate either quantitative or qualitative research methods both are somewhat inadequate indicators of effective principles, a combination of the two research methods would provide a more comprehensive explanation of the effective practices and principles of college readiness programs by making note of trends and generalizations as well as an exhaustive knowledge of the participant's perspectives (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2007). For this reason this study will be incorporating a triangulation mixed-methods approach. The school staff perceptions will be collected in qualitative focus group interviews while alumni student perceptions will be collected through a quantitative survey.

The key findings from the literature show that the important components of an internal college readiness program are: academic preparation; the guidance counselor; teacher involvement; parental involvement; and college publicity. Continuing this research agenda, the researchers will gather data on school staff and alumni student perceptions of their experiences in the chosen internal college readiness program: KIPP Pride High, Gaston. In order to create a blue print for successful internal college readiness programs the following recommendations would be valuable: a comparison of two or more internal college readiness programs to discover more essential components; and a study of students who attend a high school qualifying as an internal college readiness program but are also enrolled in an external college readiness program to assess if the access to higher education is heightened for that student.

Introduction

"Low income students who aspire to go to college are frequently overwhelmed by the complexity of college preparation" (De La Rosa & Tierney, 2006, p. 1). Oftentimes low-income students also double as aspiring first generation college students; being first generation college students unfortunately decreases their likelihood of attending college (Engle, 2007). Low-income students who do aspire to go to college are left to rely on their schools to provide resources on the college-going process (Pitre & Pitre, 2009). Unfortunately, the number of schools who have recognized the dependency of their low-income students and have then aligned their school culture and curriculum to reflect the college needs of low-income students is low (Conley, 2007). This mixed methods study aims to add to the body of knowledge that describes the effectiveness of school-based college readiness programs through the analysis of one school's college readiness program. This chapter introduces the problem with the lack of empirical evidence on college readiness programs.

Problem Statement

Having established the importance of college readiness programs for low-income students, empirical evidence that documents the successful elements of college readiness programs in high schools with large numbers of low-income students is lacking in dearth. A proposed study of one repeatedly successful school based college readiness program for low-income students enhances the empirically-based data for current and future college readiness programs for low-income students.

The population affected by the scarcity of empirical evidence of successful college readiness programs is ultimately the low-income students that attend schools with no or ineffective college readiness programs. The students are already disadvantaged because of their low socioeconomic backgrounds and the lack of college resources in the school serves as a further disadvantage. Another population affected by the problem of limited empirical evidence on successful college readiness programs is the community from which low-income students originate. The lack of research on the successful elements of college readiness programs can lead to a lack of information on how to effectively replicate future programs. Without successful college readiness programs, the access to higher education for low-income students may continue to be limited, therefore furthering the cycle of generations without a college education. The community with continuous generation of people without a college education then becomes negatively affected as research shows that people who attend college are more apt to improve their communities (Perna & Swail, 2000; Stern, Dayton & Raby, 2010). The effect that college education has on communities heightens the need for studying and replicating profitable college readiness programs to sustain communities.

Although this is a proposed study of a single case of a reputedly successful internal college readiness program in a high school in Gaston, North Carolina, the issue of the lack of empirically based evidence on the factors that make college readiness programs repeatedly successful is a national problem. The consensus is that information on college readiness programs is unreliable and provides little useful information (Gullat & Jan, 2003; Perna & Swail, 2003; Stern, Dayton & Raby, 2010; Domina, 2010). Gullat and Jan (2003) state that the existing empirical research on college readiness programs more so focuses on the concepts and beliefs about college readiness that guide these programs but not on the actual practices that make them effective or ineffective (Gullat & Jan, 2003).

This focus on the framework and not on the practice is what contributes to the lack of empirical research. Perna and Swail (2003) suggest that future research identify a combination of factors that are most effective in accomplishing the goal of increased access in underrepresented groups. Suggestions for future research pose several questions. For example: Research states that early intervention is best but what grade constitutes early enough intervention? What type of students should these programs consist of? What role does parental involvement play? If parental involvement does play a role how can administrators effectively encourage parental participation?

Purpose Statement and Research Questions

This study aims to add to the existing body of knowledge concerning the effective elements of college readiness programs. The purpose of this inquiry is to explore and understand the factors that contribute to a perpetually successful college readiness program in a high school with high numbers of low-income students based on evidence from existing literature, school staff, and alumni student perceptions. Based on the previously stated problem statement and purpose statement the questions that this research will address are:

Literature Question:

1. What are the components of an internal college readiness program that are most influential for low-income high students pursuing higher education?

Site Question:

2. To what extent do KIPP school staff and alumni perceptions confirm what the literature describes as influential components of internal college readiness programs?

A mixed methods study, which will be explained later in Chapter 3, will be used during this study.

Definition of Terms

The following section will define several of the key terms that this research study uses, for example: college readiness programs; external college readiness programs; internal college readiness programs; and low-income students. These terms are relevant to this research because they are regularly used terms when discussing access to college for underrepresented groups like low-income students. The terms have been defined based on the college readiness literature but have been augmented to fit the specific context of the current study.

College readiness programs. College readiness programs are defined as programs designed to provide disadvantaged students with the opportunity to develop the skills, knowledge, confidence, aspirations, and overall preparedness for college early enough in their schooling to influence their ultimate educational attainment levels (Perna & Swail, 2000). Some of the services provided are information and assistance in college admissions and motivational activities like college mentoring, college visits, advocacy, and academic enrichment including rigorous high school curriculum

and tutoring. According to research (Bergin, Hooks & Bergin, 2007; Engle, 2007) there are endless types of college readiness programs that target low-income, minority, and first generation students but for the purpose of this research, the college readiness programs mentioned will be categorized as either external or internal programs. The research requires that the college readiness programs mentioned be categorized as internal college readiness programs or external college readiness programs because the scope of the study is an internal college readiness program.

External college readiness programs. External programs are college readiness programs sponsored by the federal government, state government, not-for profit organizations, and individual colleges and universities (Perna & Swail, 2000). An important characteristic of these external programs is that although they might take place in school setting or during the school day, their functions are not to affect a school's existing curriculum or teach practices but to instead supplement and extend "a student's weekday curricula and extracurricular experiences" (Gullat & Jan, 2003).

Internal college readiness programs. Internal programs are a regular apparatus of the school in which they exist; therefore, they are implemented, operated, and funded by the school system. While the overall focus of this paper is on an internal college readiness program there will be information provided about external programs, in order to provide a depth of information on the successful factors of college readiness programs.

Low-income students. For the purposes of this paper, low income is defined as usage of free and reduced-price meal benefits for the National School Lunch program provided by the United States Government. In order to qualify for the program the child must come from a family where the income is near or below the national poverty line. This paper is focuses on high schools that have a majority of low-income students; the definition of majority for the purposes of this paper is a school where more than 50% of the students are receiving free or reduced lunch meals.

Scope, Limitations, Delimitations

Scope

The scope of a research study defines where and when the study was conducted and who the subjects were (Sevilla, Ochave, Punsalan, Regala & Uriarte, 2007). For the purposes of this paper, the scope is a single high school setting in Gaston, North Carolina. The high school has over 65% of its students qualifying for free or reduced lunch. The subjects of this case study are the teachers and administrators in the school who are implementing the school's college readiness program and also past student participants.

Limitations

The limitation of a study is the phase or aspect of the investigation which might affect the result adversely but over which the researcher has no control (Sevilla et. al, 2007). Below are the limitations for the study:

Research Design. Interviews limit the ability to generalize about what this study will find as the effective components of college readiness programs. However, the data produced will allow for similar schools with similar characteristics as the KIPP Gaston school to create similar internal college readiness programs. Quantitative surveys limit the depth of information provided on a topic because the survey cannot account for an individual's opinion. However through the use of mixed-methods the researcher hopes to develop rich data that provides a comprehensive look at school based college readiness programs.

Scope. The scope of the study also limits the research finding's ability to be generalized for other schools. This study focuses on one school in one rural town and therefore poses a problem to other schools, who do not share many characteristics with the school in this study. The lack of generalization may make replicating the model found at KIPP difficult for other schools.

Framework. Research studies are shaped by the framework chosen by the researcher and they become the basis of the study. For this reason, the research is also limited to the constraints of the selected framework. The theoretical framework guiding this research is social capital theory. Social capital theory allows the researcher to identify the sources of social capital, which are the resources embedded in one's social networks, resources that can be accessed or mobilized through ties in the networks (Lin, 2005, p. 4). The major drawback with using social capital theory as the framework is that it only looks at one network. In this study, social capital theory will only be looking at the network developed by the internal college readiness program. However, there may be students who are gaining the social capital necessary for college enrollment though outside programs.

Reliance on self-reported information. This study requires that school staff, teachers, and recent graduates of KIPP high school report their experiences in the school based college readiness program. While this study has to rely heavily on self-reported information in order to formulate data, participants might over emphasize both their positive and/or negative experiences and over-emphasis in the data results in research that is plagued with bias. Nevertheless, this study will exercise all measures to reduce participant bias.

Delimitations

The delimitations of a study indicate the variables that are not apart of the study and addresses how the scope of the study will be narrowed (Creswell, 1994). The delimitations here are racial disparities, external college readiness programs, and all high schools as this is a case study of one high school.

Significance of the Study

Studying reputedly successful college readiness programs is a significant topic of investigation for several reasons. The first is that Hill (2008) states that it is significant to study the organization of a school when it comes to facilitating a students transition to college because the actions that the schools take to guide students to college makes a difference on the students postsecondary outcomes. Secondly, there is no empirical evidence on what makes a college readiness program reputedly successful (Gullat & Jan, 2003; Perna & Swail, 2003; Stern, Dayton & Raby, 2010; Domina, 2010). Research (Bergin, Hooks & Bergin, 2007; Gandara and Bial, 2001, as cited in Cabrera, Deil Amen, Prabhu, Terenzini, Lee & Franklin, JR , 2006) state that the lack of program evaluation “sharply limits assessment of these outreach programs’ effectiveness (p. 80). Thirdly, Farmer-Hinton (2008) suggests for more research on internal college readiness programs for underrepresented students as most internal college readiness programs are benefiting affluent and white students. Farmer-Hinton’s claim makes this research significant because it adds to the body knowledge on college access for underrepresented groups like low-income students. A fourth significance of this study is that it has always been the requirement of secondary education institutions to prepare its students for college and this study presents a method for schools to meet this requirement (Barker, Clay & Gratama, 2005).

Over the years, researchers have come up with a list of the benefits of college attendance. The benefits range from enjoyment of the college experience, to economic growth, to increased civic involvement (Perna & Swail, 2000; Stern, Dayton & Raby, 2010). Knowing this, it is important that all efforts be made to gain access for low-income students, who traditionally would be excluded from the college experience. While the federal government has made gains with their college readiness programs, since the implementation of the 1965 Higher Education Act, there is very little empirical evidence about the factors of these programs that provide success. The proposed study on the effective practices and principles of college readiness programs is significant because it is in line with the previous research that calls for empirical research on the specific factors of these programs that promote successful college access.

Review of Literature and Explanation of Conceptual Framework

Literature on Access to Higher Education

Educational opportunity and success are uneven in the United States by income and by race/ethnicity (Swail et. al., 2003; Perna, 2006; Radcliffe & Stevens, 2008; Holland & Hinton, 2009). As low income students tend to represent the majority of disadvantaged people in both categories they tend to be the most disadvantaged in the realms of educational opportunity and success (Perna, 2006). The main challenge is for parents and schools to help students create a connection between their desire to go to college and the college entrance preparation process (Radcliffe & Stevens, 2008)

Access to higher education for low-income students is important, according to Swail, Redd and Perna (2003), “because although gaps will always exist in who goes to college and who ultimately succeeds, it still holds true that education has the greatest potential to benefit all” (p.5). In another study, Perna (2006) states that increasing access to college is especially important for underrepresented students who stand at the margin between attending and not attending college. According to Perna (2006), many underrepresented students who could be prospective college students are misinformed about the cost and benefits of a college education.

Access to higher education is also important because of the numerous benefits that are associated with college attendance. For one, the enjoyment of the college experience, that includes the learning environment, participation in athletic, cultural, and social events and overall enhancement of social status. Another benefit is the economic growth associated with having at least a bachelor's degree due to the enhanced productivity of labor resulting from higher levels of educational attainment (Perna & Swail, 2000; Perna, 2006). Perna (2006) also states that guaranteeing that all individuals have the opportunity for college enrollment is a crucial step. The neighborhood that the student originates from and returns to also receives the benefit of economic growth, as there is a decreased dependency on economic welfare/Medicaid programs and lastly, there is an increased civic involvement associated with college attendance that includes increased volunteerism and increased voting rates (Perna & Swail, 2000; Perna, 2006; Stern, Dayton & Raby, 2010).

History of access to higher education in the United States. The G.I. Bill, the Serviceman's Readjustment Act of 1944, was introduced to help military servicemen reintegrate into the economy and society after the war (Swail et. al., 2003). According to Swail, Redd & Perna (2003) the 1960s saw the War on Poverty and two major legislative packages: The Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the Higher Education Act of 1965. These bills established the tenet for future federal involvement in education, which historically had been a state responsibility. The federal government had already laid the groundwork for access to postsecondary education through the G.I. Bill (Swail et. al., 2003), but the legislation of the mid-1960s expanded the federal role through new student financial aid programs and academic support programs, such as the TRIO programs (see below). As President Johnson said upon signing the Higher Education Act of 1965, "We need to do more . . . to extend the opportunity for higher education more broadly among lower and middle income families" (Swail et. al., 2003, p. 9).

The 1970s continued the federal government's expansion into support for educational opportunity, resulting in the Pell Grant. President Nixon announced that the Pell Grant ensured that "no qualified student who wants to go to college should be barred by lack of money" (Swail et. al., 2003, p. 10). Later reauthorizations of the Higher Education Act established more programs, with the greatest expansion of aid coming in 1992 through the introduction of the unsubsidized loan programs (Wolanin, 1998). Federal expansion into education was founded on the generally agreed principle that federal responsibility lay in opening the doors of higher education. A huge expansion of access occurred in the 1990s, driven partially by an economy that needed highly skilled individuals. While throughout our history, the government has intervened at various times to further open access to underrepresented groups (Swail et. al., 2003) the numbers of low-income graduating from higher institutions is still substantially lower than their well-off counterparts (Perna & Swail, 2000).

Several schools have tried to implement their internal college readiness programs. Hill (2008) found that high school organizational characteristics play a role in access to college. While every high school's internal college readiness program is not considered successful Hill (2008) found three ways to categorize the college linking strategies found in high schools that rank from little organization commitment to student outcomes to exceptional organizational commitment to student outcomes. The first is the traditional strategy, providing students with limited college resources; next is the clearinghouse strategy which has fairly adequate college resources; and lastly the brokering strategies which provide an exceptional amount of college planning resources for students and their parents (Hill, 2008).

Literature on External College Readiness Programs

External college readiness programs are sponsored by the federal government, state government, not-for profit organizations, and individual colleges and universities. The key aspect of external college readiness programs is that they are not integrated and operated by the school.

The federal government has been one of the primary leaders in creating and providing funding for these external programs. A prime example of a government funded external college readiness program is the TRIO program, established as part of the original War on Poverty during the Johnson Administration (Pitre & Pitre, 2009). The goal of the TRIO program is to increase equal opportunity for US citizens by providing programs that develop aspirations for higher education and enhance college readiness for students from low-income, first generation college, and ethnic/racial minority groups (Pitre & Pitre 2009). The TRIO initiative includes eight programs targeted to serve and assist low-income individuals, first-generation college students, and individuals with disabilities to progress through the academic pipeline from middle school to post baccalaureate programs (Gullat & Jan, 2003; Perna & Swail, 2000; Pitre & Pitre, 2009). Currently, TRIO programs serve over 850,000 low-income, first-generation students and students with disabilities, from sixth grade through college graduation which amounts to more than 2,800 programs nationally

and a budget of over \$848.1 million for the year of 2009 (Council for Opportunity in Education). Several of the existing TRIO programs are dedicated solely to create access to higher education for traditional high school students: Upward Bound, Upward Bound Math and Science, and Educational Talent Search. (US Department of Education: Office of Post Secondary Education, 2010). While TRIO programs serve to increase the rates of college enrollment amongst underrepresented students TRIO programs are often criticized for practicing reverse discrimination because the eligibility requirements exclude students from dominant ethnic/racial groups or those from high socioeconomic backgrounds (Pitre & Pitre, 2009).

Upward Bound was created in 1964 as apart of Educational Opportunity Act (Gullat & Jan, 2003; Perna & Swail, 2000). As one of the first external programs, Upward Bound works with small groups of students to provide them with college awareness and college preparation (Engle, 2007). These workshops are held after-school, on Saturday and summer courses on college campuses that provide academic instruction (Engle, 2007). The workshop topics cover the wide range of the college going process, one of the topics pertinent to low-income students include financial aid-information, primarily on how to fill out the Free Application for Student Aid (Engle, 2007). As of, Upward Bound served programs with students nationwide (Perna & Swail, 2000). Upward Bound is the most researched TRIO programs and the results on the effectiveness of the program show that while Upward Bound has a positive effect on student college aspirations and overall educational attainment Upward Bound has no effect on academic preparation or a students GPA (Pitre & Pitre, 2009). Council for Opportunity in Education statistics on the 2005 Upward Bound cohort states that 77.3% of all students who participated in Upward Bound programs matriculated to college the fall after graduating. The statistics go on to prove that there is a positive relationship between persistence in Upward Bound and college matriculation as 91.2% of Upward Bound students who participated in the program for three years or longer and 93% who participated through high school graduation enrolled in a postsecondary program immediately following high school.

Talent Search provides participants and their families with information on college admissions, scholarships and financial aid. It came about as apart of the 1965 Higher Education Act and as of 2000, there are 300,000 6th-12th students in the program with 319 sites across the country.

According to the Council for Opportunity in Education TRIO programs are important to low-income students because they are being left behind in the race to a college education. Statistics from the Council for Opportunity in Education show that only 38% of low-income high school seniors go straight to college as compared to 81% of their peers in the highest income quartile. Of those low-income students enrolled in college, low-income students earn bachelor's degrees at a rate that is less than half of that of their high-income peers — 21% as compared with 45% (Council for Opportunity in Education).

Along with the TRIO programs, the federal government has also implemented two grant projects, NEISP and GEAR-UP. NEISP is the National Early Intervention Scholarship Program started in 1992 by federal government offering matching grants to states for providing financial incentives, academic support services and counseling, and college related information to disadvantaged students and their parents (Perna & Swail, 2000). Then in 1998, Congress implemented the Gaining Early Awareness and Readiness for Undergraduate Programs. GEAR -UP was created in an effort to supercede NEISP. This grant was open to all states and partnerships creating a program to increase the number of low-income students who are prepared to enter and succeed in postsecondary education (Perna & Swail, 2000). These partnerships help provide college planning activities and related information to students, typically starting in their in their seventh grade year, and helps build long-term relationships among school districts, colleges, and other community stakeholders (Radcliffe & Stevens, 2008).

Research shows (Pitre & Pitre, 2009) that while TRIO programs have made some gains in increasing college aspirations and access for underrepresented students a major threat to TRIO programs is the lack of funding. According to the Council for Opportunity in Education, while the TRIO programs have proved to be successful, funding for TRIO programs has remained relatively the same over the years. Pitre and Pitre (2009) suggest that while the need for TRIO programs still exists; the lack of funding limits the amount of TRIO participants. To compensate for the limited reach of TRIO programs Pitre and Pitre (2009) suggest that schools, more specifically teachers, counselors and staff, aim to replicate pre-college programs within the schools because “many of the college preparation and transition experiences provided to students served by TRIO Programs can be easily replicated in schools for little to no cost” (p.108).

Literature on Internal College Readiness Programs

As earlier defined, internal college readiness programs are implemented by the school and focus not only on a targeted group but serve as a school-wide effort to increase access to higher education. While these programs are school run they can include outside factors like partnerships with community and university partnerships to ensure graduation, that students are academically prepared for the rigor of college classes, and also that students have equal information about future careers (Martinez & Klopott, 2003; Stern, Dayton & Raby, 2010).

The benefit of internal college readiness programs is the school integration that is provided: external programs are considered fragile if they aren't connected to schools curricula, despite their gains in college enrolment (Holland & Hinton 2009). Also, external programs constantly face the challenge of funds being cut, however if it was an internal program the school would have to provide these funds (Holland & Hinton 2009). Not to mention, college readiness preprograms cannot be the sole responsibility of those who meets with a subset of students, it is dependent of the entire school (Corwin & Tierney, 2007). External programs are good because they offer student-centered work, like individual meetings, focused classes, college related activities, however it is not enough to bring over a cultural change (McClafferty, McDonough & Nunez, 2002). Nevertheless, a negative attribute of these internal programs is that they tend to offer less services, however since it is in a school they are able to offer their receive college guidance and resources to a wider array of students (Domina, 2009; McClafferty, McDonough & Nunez, 2002).

While no universal internal college readiness program has been implemented nationwide, this section contains a review of literature of the most noted design components of these internal programs: academic preparation, the guidance counselor, and creating a college environment.

Academic preparation. Academic preparation is a key factor to access to higher education as the two main academic steps that are critical to college advancement are completing high school courses that are rigorous and taking standardized tests like the PSAT, SAT, ACT and ACT or SAT Subject (McClafferty, McDonough & Nunez, 2002; Savitz-Romer, Jager-Hyman & Coles, 2009). According to Swail, Redd and Perna (2003), the first critical juncture on the road to a bachelor's degree is becoming academically prepared during high school to enroll in college. While academic preparation is noted as the most critical step, low-income students are often unprepared for or discouraged from taking the courses in high school that will academically prepare them for college (McClafferty, McDonough & Nunez 2002; Savitz-Romer, Jager-Hyman & Coles, 2009).

Also, improving student teacher relations, aligning education, implementing academic preparation and strengthening community ties (Martinez & Klopott 2003). Improving student teacher relationships allows for a more personalized learning environment which allow for students and teachers to get to know each other which can ultimately result in teachers being able to plan and carry out lesson plans that cater to the specific needs and culture in the classroom (Martinez & Klopott 2003). Savitz-Romer, Jager-Hyman & Coles, 2009 also suggest incorporating a model of academic support involving "formal and informal strategies that build, strengthen, and promote students command of subject matter and skill development through deliberate activities, structures, policies and expectations" (pg.6).

Another suggestion for improving academic preparation for low-income students is alignment within the schools. Alignment calls for teachers within different grades aligning their coursework so that each grade prepares students for the subsequent grade and that each grade is also building upon the skills taught in previous years (Martinez & Klopott 2003; Savitz-Romer, Jager-Hyman & Coles, 2009)). Alignment also includes the representatives from the university partnership. Any academic support provided by the 13-16 sector should align with the curriculum taught in the school. The 13-16 sector should also be providing academic interventions where they are not only helping students with the academic coursework but also training teachers on how to help students who are struggling with the course material. Lastly, improving community ties is important in academic preparation because it brings relevance to students learning experience, thus engaging students in school while buildings ties to the community.

College guidance counselor. While academic preparedness is the key factor to access, the guidance counselor serves as an equally important factor as they are able to provide options for all students whether in good or bad academic standing. The primary responsibility of the guidance counselor is to provide students with college information and resources (McClafferty, McDonough, & Nunez, 2002). As the key to establishing a college culture within schools, they are creating and implementing the school's normative expectations for student's college destinations, this is especially essential for the students whose families cannot provide them with this information (McClafferty, McDonough, & Nunez, 2002).

They are also responsible for dispensing the information and resources on college to the students in the school. Having this information and resources is important for the students because the college going process is made up of predisposition, search and choice, in order to create this culture students must first be provided with general, in-depth information on college (McClafferty, McDonough, & Nunez, 2002). According to McClafferty, McDonough, & Nunez, (2002), only after they have been provided with enough general information on college and the college process can they make reasonable decisions on the types of college they want to attend, admissions criteria that they do or do not meet, financial issue, and an array of other issue.

However as guidance counselors serve as a key component in college readiness programs, college guidance is often not the single responsibility are the key component, oftentimes college guidance is not the only responsibility. As seen dropout, pregnancy, and gang violence rates continue to be on the rise, the less attention college guidance tends to receive.

Swail, Redd and Perna (2003) present the term “intergenerational” that applies to the effect of a lack of college attendance. In the article he states that when parents do not attend college it creates a cycle of a generation that might not go to college because they do not have their parents as resources to guide them along the college process (Swail et. al., 2003). Muhammad (2008) echoes this issue saying “misinformation in the African American community regarding college costs, access, and the benefits of a college education abound...counseling from a trustworthy, supportive school counselor can make a difference in stemming African American talent loss” (Muhammad, 2008, p. 81).

The necessity of college guidance counselor is especially existent in low socioeconomic communities, which might have the highest number of parents without college degrees (Muhammad, 2008). In these schools it becomes especially important to have a college guidance counselor because it appears that students understanding of their counselors expectations for their future education positively influences college predisposition (Muhammad, 2008).

Creating a college culture in secondary schools. While the guidance counselor does provide for an increase in access, there are schools that do not have this as a resource and therefore a solution to their access problem to create a college climate in their schools. The college culture exists in a school culture that encourages all students to consider college after high school by introducing them to information about higher education opportunities during early adolescence and in high school through formal and informal conversations that specifically pertain to the students current and future lives in an effort to aid them in making an informed decision about their futures (Holland & Hinton, 2009; Radcliffe & Stevens, 2008; McClafferty, McDonough & Nunez, 2002).

The creation of college cultures within the schools in poor communities is important because there are a lack of college educated parents to help guide the students in their journey to higher education (Holland & Hinton, 2009; McClafferty, McDonough & Nunez 2002). Creating a college culture is also important because De La Rosa and Tierney (2006) state that a high schools culture of preparation is a large factor of influence on a students access to college and for low income students, their financial aid related information. Last, research (Jarsky, McDonough & Nunez, 2009 & McClafferty, McDonough & Nunez, 2002; De La Rosa & Tierney, 2006) state that the road to college should not be paved only by the guidance counselor but should instead be a school wide effort. A school wide effort requires that all school personnel provide a consistent message to students that emphasize the support for their quest for a college preparatory K-12 experience.

College/University partnerships. Building this college climate in secondary schools is important because extensive empirical evidence exists on how the high school environments exert powerful influences on student’s college aspirations and preparation (Jarsky, McDonough & Nunez, 2009). The way Jarsky, McDonough & Nunez (2009) suggest to build this college climate is through a partnership with a university. Research has shown that the idea behind University and Urban K-12 school partnerships is to merge the tenets of educational theory into practice. Each institution is thought to benefit: Universities gain information for their research, and/or training sites for their teaching students and schools receive help in instruction and facilitating positive relationships between teaching staff and administrators (Dugery & Knowles, 2003 & Saunders, 2003). However, while the idea behind the partnerships may seem simplistic the actual implementation is not. The research that has been conducted on the implementation of these partnerships state that many fail because of the tumultuous relationships between the University faculty and the K-12 school staff, where faculty administration and the schools are often adversaries (Lieberman, 1986) where the main problem boils down to shock, turf, and communication (Goldring & Sims, 2005).

Parental involvement. Research (Muhammad, 2008; McClafferty, McDonough & Nunez, 2002; Radcliffe & Stephens, 2003), states that family involvement is another major aspect of college culture. According to Perna (2006), parental knowledge and information that promote college enrollment may also be reflected by, and acquired via parental contact with the school about education-related matters. Muhammad (2008) states that for low-income schools, parents should start becoming more knowledgeable, while this is a viable option, a lot of the parents in low socioeconomic environments this might not have access to this information, because they did not attend college (Radcliffe & Stephens, 2003), causing them to feel uncomfortable or even unnecessary in the college going process (McClafferty, McDonough & Nunez, 2002). Schools need to invest in building personal contacts and connections with the student's family by building a welcoming climate for the parents within the school because parental involvement in their child's education promotes college access (Perna, 2006). McClafferty, McDonough & Nunez (2002) suggest schools ask themselves if there are opportunities for parents to visit the school and how do parents know what is happening at the school. Radcliffe and Stephens (2003) also suggest to implementing parental support groups for those parents who did not attend college and therefore have no information to provide for their children.

Teacher involvement. Teachers and principals in this neighborhood also serve as viable contributors to the college culture since they have all attended an institution of higher education (Corwin & Tierney, 2007). Using their own experiences they can build a college climate in these low SES schools. In empowering teachers and administrators to take on this task, they must first be able to recognize their own cultural beliefs that might lead them to have biases over the students that they are teaching then it must be instilled in the staff that college prep is the goal for each student (Martinez & Klopott 2003). The staff also must set clear expectations of the students that they must all attend college because students without clear expectations are denied the support, information and resources necessary for success (McClafferty, McDonough & Nunez 2002). Clear expectations can be set by implementing college based mission statements and implementing constant evaluation of the expectation, by asking questions like are we meeting this expectation and what are the student outcomes (McClafferty, McDonough & Nunez, 2002).

Teachers are also important because they serve as the basis of social support, inside the school, for students looking for assistance in applying to institutions of higher education (Holland & Hinton, 2009). Holland and Hinton (2009) define social support as a core element of college culture that allows for students to foster personalized relationships where frequent communication, academic norms, and the sharing of valuable resources exist. The model of social support that Holland and Hinton (2009) describes is best defined by Savitz-Romer, Jager-Hyman and Coles (2009): "strategies that foster and fortify social networks, school-connectedness, self confidence, and academic motivation through intentional services, behaviors, and expectations" (pg. 6). Research (Holland & Hinton, 2009) argues that this is best done by teachers because they can best understand the students academic potential by developing personal connections allow for students to become more engaged in school. By forming these personal connections teachers should be creating expectations to should always be thinking about college and how to become enrolled (Holland & Hinton, 2009). This falls in line the educational theorist, Nel Noddings, who stressed the importance of care in education. Noddings theorized that students will work harder if the teacher is deemed as caring and trustworthy (Noddings, 1992). This idea of care is what Noddings says is needed in order for schools to evoke positive change.

College publicity. Another important part of the college culture is the college publicity. College publicity allows high school students to benefit from ever-present reminders of college expectations manifested in written and verbal missives and activities designed to highlight the college paths of school staff (McClafferty, McDonough & Nunez, 2002). This can be seen both verbal and non-verbal form of communication. The earlier parts of this review of literature have covered, in depth, examples of verbal communication however; examples of non-verbal communication include college posters, newsletters and newspaper columns (McClafferty, McDonough & Nunez, 2002). De La Rosa and Tierney (2006) suggest that the verbal forms of college publicity, for example newsletter and newspaper columns include data on college achievement, for example: the post secondary destinations, range of SAT and GPA scores, and percentage meeting college admission requirements of recent alumni. Radcliffe and Stephens (2003) report that the key components in building the college culture are access to technology and campus visits. The technology calls for students to have an increased ability to read and write in multimodal and digital forms as well as being able to communicate online are particularly critical skills for today's college-bound students. Campus Visits that include financial aid sessions; a chance to sit in on a college class; and time to write a reflection on the visit is a necessary component

Summary and Implications of the Literature Review

A college education is an individual's most viable asset in today's economy. A college education creates opportunities to earn more money, and help one's community. While the value of a college education has been stated and restated there are still many individuals who do not have a college education because they did not have resources to provide them with access to higher education. However, educators and similarly those with a stake in education have created college readiness programs for underrepresented students like low-income students.

The main source of external college readiness programs for low-income youth are the TRIO programs, which were created as part of the Johnson Administration (Pitre & Pitre, 2009; Swail, Redd & Perna, 2000). TRIO programs provide support to first generation low-income students in order to create opportunities for program participants to succeed in matriculating to college. TRIO programs now serve Currently TRIO programs serve over 850,000 low-income, first-generation students and students with disabilities, from sixth grade through college graduation which amounts to more than 2,800 programs nationally and a budget of over \$848.1 million for the year of 2009 (Council for Opportunity in Education).

While external college readiness programs like TRIO programs have contributed to increasing access to college for low income students the large budget that external programs require is a huge detriment to such programs (Pitre & Pitre, 2009). Pitre and Pitre (2009) suggest that schools incorporate some of the college readiness aspects used in TRIO programs within school since many of the college readiness design factors of TRIO are easily replicated and less financially demanding. Internal based programs also have the benefit of being inside a school, which allows the participant reach of the program to be larger than external programs (Domina, 2009; McClafferty, McDonough & Nunez, 2002).

The important components of internal college readiness programs are the academic preparation, guidance counselor, and college culture within the school. Academic preparation include rigorous high school classes especially in math and science and also the ability for students to earn college credit while still in high school through either AP classes or dual enrollment in neighboring colleges (De La Rosa & Tierney, 2006; Engle, 2007; Martinez & Klopott, 2003; McClafferty, McDonough & Nunez, 2002, Stern, Dayton & Raby, 2010). The guidance counselor provides the school with the college center, which is the hub for students to access information about college (McClafferty, McDonough, & Nunez, 2002). The guidance counselor is also responsible for hosting school workshops that inform students and parents about the different aspects of the college going process (De La Rosa & Tierney, 2006). Building a college culture within high schools is very important because a schools culture determines the focus of the school (Corwin & Tierney, 2007).

The college culture should include college partnerships, parental involvement, teacher involvement, and college publicity. College partnerships allow for schools to provide their students with first hand accounts on the college experience for example, the rigor of the curriculum, information on how to attain financial aid and also a view on college culture (Jarsky, McDonough & Nunez, 2009). Parental involvement is important because encouragement and support form parents, even from parents who did not attend college, greatly affects a students college going plans (Engle, 2007). It is the responsibility of the school to ensure that parents who did not attend an institution of higher education feel comfortable getting involved with their student's college going process (McClafferty, McDonough & Nunez, 2002). Teachers are also part of the college culture because as individuals who have already graduated from college teachers, alongside the guidance counselors, can provide students with various resources on how to get to college and what to expect once they enroll (Corwin & Tierney, 2007, McClafferty, McDonough & Nunez, 2002). By making teachers apart of the college culture internal college readiness programs can ensure that the entire school is working towards the goal of college access for the students enrolled (Martinez & Klopott, 2003) College publicity is the promotion of college through verbal and non-verbal cues around the school. Examples included in the review of literature are college paraphernalia in the hallways, college visits, and college newsletters (De La Rosa & Tierney, 2006; McClafferty, McDonough & Nunez, 2002; Radcliffe & Stephens, 2003).

Explanation of Conceptual Framework

Social capital theory

The conceptual framework that will guide this study is the social capital theory. Social capital is defined as resources inherent in one's social networks, resources that can be accessed or mobilized through memberships in social networks or other social organizations (Coleman, 1988; Lin, 2005, p. 4; Portes, 1998). An important byproduct of social capital is the potential for information that is engrafted into social relations (Coleman, 1988). The information is produced by actors and shared through social networks.

Actors are agents of social capital and have the ability to distribute and receive social capital. Those agents who distribute social capital, according to Stanton-Salazar (1997, as cited in Gonzalez, Stoner & Jovel, 2001) "provide valued resources and opportunities including emotional support, access to privileged information or knowledge and access to opportunities for college admittance" (Gonzalez, Stoner & Jovel, 2001, p.152)

Forming these networks is important because it is within the networks that the resources for social capital are embedded (Coleman, 1988; Lin, 2005; Portes, 1998). An overall characteristic of all the actors in the network is high levels of motivation and dedication. Using Lin's (2005) definition of mobilized social capital where social capital is defined in terms of its genuine use in the social network the expectation is that "the better the capital used the better the return" (p. 5). Lin's (2005) expectation requires that the actors in the social network are motivated to enter into a social network and dedicated to achieve the overall goal of college access.

Research (Coleman, 1988; Lin, 2005; Portes, 1998) notes that social capital does not exist within the actors or production outputs but is produced through an actor's relationship with others who have certain advantages or high stratification in society or those who facilitate action. Portes (1998) states that the actors in the social network have direct access to the resources available in the network. A key aspect of social capital is that it is not as tangible as physical capital, which is observable in material form (Coleman, 1988). Social Capital can best be measured through access and mobility of the social structure as social capital comes through the changes in the relations among the people that facilitate action (Lin, 2005). This study aims to measure social capital through the access to and availability of relationships between the students and the guidance counselors, teachers and college resources.

Rationale for Use of Social Capital Theory

Using social capital as a theory provides several benefits to the researcher. Firstly, Portes (1998) states that the use of social capital theory illuminates how non-monetary resources can become important sources of power and influence. Using social capital theory allows for the researcher to formulate theoretical propositions for identifying sources and returns on social capital (Lin, 2005). Secondly, social capital theory allows for researchers to categorize social structures and social networks by function (Coleman, 1988). Categorizing by function allows the researcher to assign value to the social capital being produced based on how well the resources assist actors achieve their interests Coleman (1988). Thirdly, because of the categorization of function researchers are better able to account for different outcomes for the actors in the network (Coleman, 1988). Fourthly, for researcher looking to create social capital within organizations social capital theory shows that combining resources produces a difference in behavior and outcomes (Coleman, 1988). Lastly, for researchers looking to examine where in social organization social capital exists, social capital theory allows for the unpacking of the concept to discover what components of the social organization contribute to the value produced (Coleman, 1988; Lin, 2005).

Application to Current Study

Most discussion of social capital theory focuses on the micro-level interaction between a small amount of individuals; however, Lin (2005) asserts that social capital theory can be adapted to represent the social networks in macro level interactions such as associations, communities, and organizations. At the macro level, social capital is seen through social networks with actors who amalgamate their resources so that social capital is seen in the embedded resources of the network provided by actors (Lin, 2005). According to Lin (2005), using social capital at the macro level allows the researcher to analyze the degree of intensity and density of these interactions. Applying Lin's idea to this study, school networks provide the students with social capital when the actors within the school combine their resources and make them available for students and parents.

This theory best fits this research because low-income students are lacking in the social capital necessary to achieve college enrollment (Farmer-Hinton & McCullough, 2008; Cabrera, Deil-Amen, Prabhu, Terenzini, Lee & Franklin Jr,

2006; Gonzalez, Stoner & Jovel, 2001) and this research presents schools as a medium for increasing the social capital for low-income students. Schools are an appropriate medium for increasing student social capital because society on a whole is not producing the same amount of public goods as in the past, which is decreasing the youths social capital; school as social organizations of social capital ensure that students receive some of these public goods the way that they used to (Coleman, 1988). Cabrera, Deil-Amen, Prabhu, Terenzini, Lee and Franklin Jr, (2006) echo the importance of school stating that they can provide the networks necessary to shape college aspirations and overall preparedness. Perna and Titus (2005; as cited in Perna, 2006), states that despite a students original social capital when first entering a school, college acceptance and enrollment can be achieved through resources accessed through social networks in the school they attend. Schools are also an important source of social capital because they exhibit a form of social control to promote compliance for the students (Portes, 1998). Therefore if the norms and goals of the school are to promote college access for its students, then the students in school will gain the resources needed to attain the schools goal.

Another reason why this study is grounded in social capital theory because a key aspect of social capital theory is that it allows the researcher to better articulate the concept of social capital by exploring what components of a social structure best contribute to the social capital that is produced (Coleman, 1988). This aspect speaks to the main purpose of this study which is to decipher which practices and principles of school based college readiness programs are most effective in creating more access to higher education for low-income students. Social capital theory allows the researcher to examine a social structure expected to give students with little to no social capital the resources to expand their social networks and gain social capital.

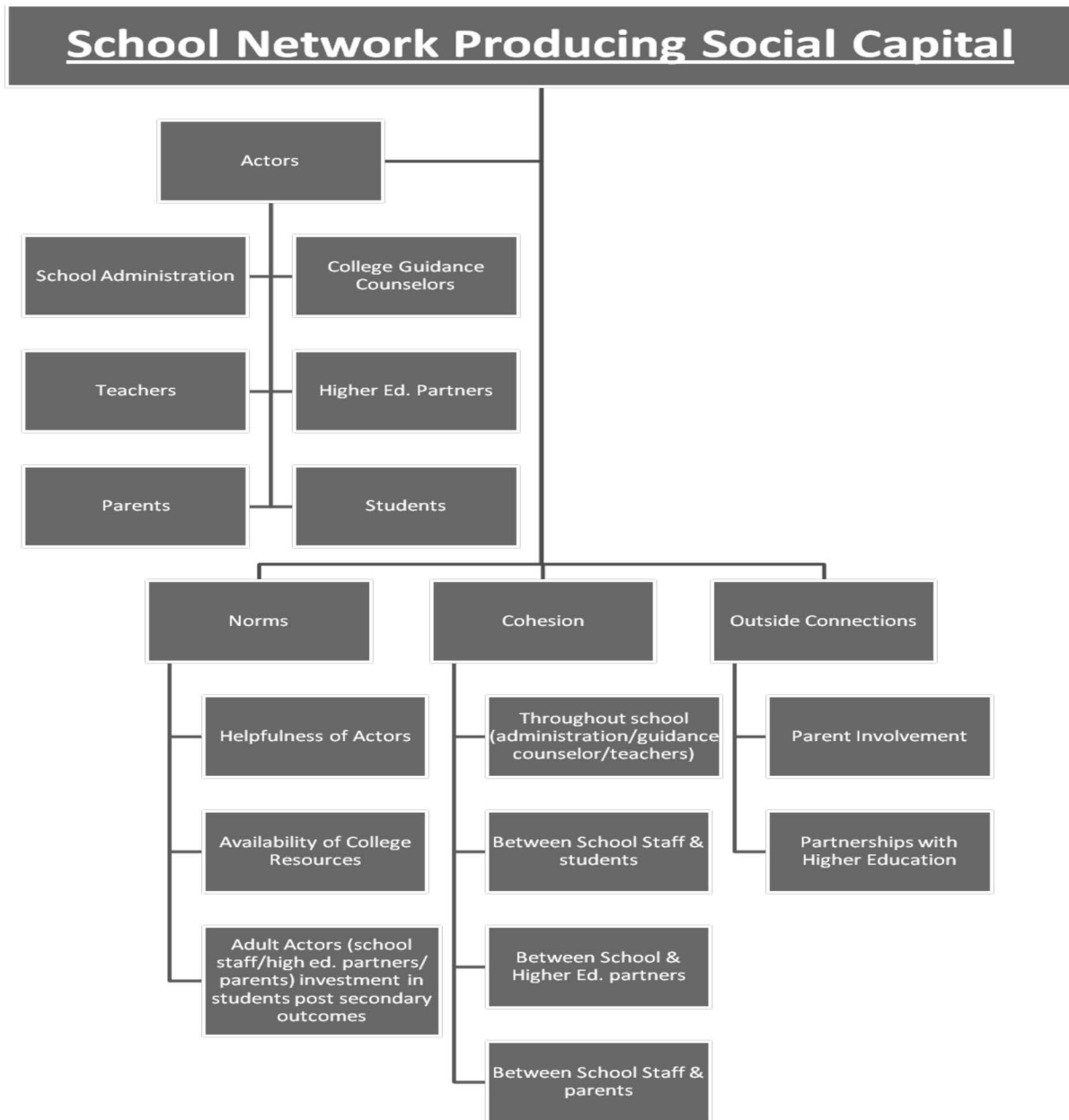
Farmer-Hinton and McCullough (2008), state that through the use of social capital theory students in a school will observe college going as a norm and receive information and resources on how to find, apply, and attend college through their relationships with people around them. Coleman (1988) also speaks about the importance of establishing norms in social capital theory stating that sustaining social capital requires the establishment of norms, as norms exists to limit negative external effects and encourage positive affects. Using social capital theory in this investigation can illuminate how norms can facilitate actions like college attendance and constrain others like dropping out of high school or not attending college. However for norms to be established in the social structure, all the actors within the structure need to be aligned where all the actors are aware of the resources that other actors are providing. Coleman (1988) describes this as a closed social structure and states that the benefit of this structure is that it allows for trustworthiness within the social structure.

Setting clear expectations also plays a part in developing norms. According to Coleman (1988), "if A does something for B and trust B to reciprocate in the future, this establishes an expectation in A and an obligation on the part of B" (pg. S102). Put in the context of this research, A represents the school staff (college guidance counselors and teachers) prepares B, low-income students, for college then A expect B to attend college and B feels obligated to fulfill this expectation. This aligns with the research that calls for schools to set clear expectations of their students in order for them to make college enrollment a reality (McClafferty, McDonough & Nunez, 2000)

Overall, social capital theory allows for the convergence of several different resources and showing that they can be combined to produce different outcomes for individuals. This is the aim of school based college readiness programs to converge the resources offered by guidance counselors, teachers, parents, and university partnerships to increase college enrollment among underrepresented youth. The resources combine to create social capital through the information dispensed to the students. Coleman states "information is the basis for action" (Coleman, 188, p. 104). This statement adds to the significance of the study, as the information provided will allow for the action of access to underrepresented groups.

Proposed model. The proposed model adapts the model of The Dimensions of Social Capital defined by Narayan and Cassidy (2001). While their model adequately presents the model for social capital in international terms, this study adapts the model, along with other research (Coleman, 1988; Gonzalez, Stoner & Jovel, 2001; Lin, 2005; Perna, 2005; Portes, 2003) to relate more to this study of a school college readiness program in particular. Figure 1 illustrates the model chosen for this study.

Figure 1. School Network producing Social Capital



Group characteristics. The actors in this social network are school administration, college guidance counselors, teachers, parents, higher education partners and students. These actors all come together to form a school network that produces social capital.

Interactions. Coleman (1988) states that all social relations and social structures facilitate social capital, knowing this it is important that the actors within the school network are positively interacting with one another to ensure that the social capital necessary to increase low-income student access to college is being produced. In order to produce this necessary type of social capital, Coleman (1988) suggests that the structure of relationships be closed where there is interaction between all of the actors in the network. Such a closed structure interaction is best because it provides the greatest assurance that all actors are working together to accomplish the same goals (Coleman, 1988). Closed structure interactions also ensure that norms developed in social organizations are effective and also that trust is built amongst actors; each of these concepts will be discussed further later (Coleman, 1988). Within these closed structure interactions the principle of “everyday socialibility (Narayan & Cassidy, 2001) should be heavily applied where actors in the structure note the frequency of which they interact with other actors.

Norms. In any organization looking to produce social capital existent and effective norms are important (Coleman, 1988). According to Coleman (1988), in the context of a school organization, norms that help to provide effective rewards for high achievement in a school greatly facilitate the schools task. This relates to research (Martinez & Klopott, 2003; McClafferty, McDonough & Nunez, 2002) that show that in schools norms need to be set for both teachers and students if goals of increased college access are to be met. Farmer-Hinton and McCullough (2008) also agree that students who view college going as a norm and receive the proper information on how to apply and pay for college will then have the social capital necessary to apply this norm to their own lives. While building social capital it is important to note that while norms foster positive outcomes they also limit other outcomes and behaviors because of the high levels of social control (Coleman, 1988; Portes, 1998). Coleman (1988) uses the example of community with effective norms for high achievement amongst its youth might limit the youth from being able to “have a good time” (Coleman, 1988, pg S105). For the context of this study it is important that schools recognize the implications that these limitations have on achieving college access goals.

For this model, the norms that need to become existent and effective are: (1) helpfulness of actors within network; (2) readiness of college resources to actors in network by other actors in network; (3) all actors need to have an interest in student post-secondary outcomes.

Cohesion amongst actors. The cohesion amongst actor’s aspect of a school network is crucial to producing social capital in the student actors because research (McClafferty, McDonough & Nunez, 2002) suggests that all members of the school organization must be actively involved in the college going process in order to have positive impact on the students. Research (Savitz-Romer, Jager-Hyman & Coles, 2009) also states that the social support between actors is what helps to build networks and motivation amongst actors. Furthermore, Savitz-Romer, Jager-Hyman and Coles (2009) suggest cohesion amongst actors is what produces motivation amongst students as they provide the foundation on which students are most likely to benefit from academic support strategies (pg. 6). Portes (1998) also suggests that social networks are not naturally formed and must be constructed through the investment or the networks actors which requires cohesion between participating actors. . As the model suggests there needs to be cohesions amongst school actors; cohesions between the school and the parents; cohesion amongst the school and higher education partners; and cohesion between school staff and students.

Portes (1998) and Coleman (1988) state that the cohesion amongst actors aspect is also important because passing along of information is a byproduct of relationships built within the social organizations producing social capital. The information passed along, according to Coleman (1988) is what is necessary for action, in this case, an increase in the access to higher education for low-income students who were originally lacking in social capital. Therefore, without cohesion between actors the relationships become more fragile and less likely to produce the necessary information.

According to Coleman (1988), the key factors in building cohesion are building trust and obligations between actors. Building trust within social organizations is important because organizations cannot be sustained without them (Coleman, 1988). As stated earlier a main difference between social and physical capital is the ability to see the results, this lack of observable results requires a strong amount of trust if all actors are expected to perform consistently at high levels.

As stated before, “if A does something for B and trust B to reciprocate in the future, this establishes an expectation in A and an obligation on the part of B” (Coleman, 1988, pg S102). This is the tenet that guides this model: each actor does something for another actor and trusts in the future the actor for which the favor has been done will reciprocate in the future. Here it is important to note that in social organizations, like schools, the social capital produced does not primarily benefit those whose efforts are necessary to provide the social capital, however all participants will eventually benefit (Coleman, 1988). For example, within the confines of this study, the actors that are necessary to produce social capital are the school administration team, college guidance counselors, teachers and higher education partners. However, the actors who will receive the highest increase in social capital and the most overall benefits are the students and parents. Nevertheless, the producing actors receive intangible benefits like social support, increase in status within institution, honor, and rewards (Coleman, 1988).

Outside connections. Lin (2005) states that acquiring social networks at the macro-level requires the recruitment of outside actors into the social network. This is where the parental and higher education partner actors come into place. As describe in the literature review parents play a large role in the student’s college going process. The school should actively seek the participation of parents in order to increase the college access for low-income students. However it is important to note while the emotional support that parents can provide is an important factor in students college

going process, it is difficult to measure the importance of the social capital that parents as actors provide (Gonzalez, Stoner & Jovel, 2001). According Gonzalez, Stoner and Gonzalez (2001), because parents of underrepresented students usually have not attended college themselves they depend on others for social capital. Higher education partners also play a large role in college access for the students. For one they can offer opportunities for students to gain college credit while still in school, they can also have school visits where they offer resources to students, parents and teachers about the college going process and experience.

Research Design and Methodology

This chapter outlines the research methodology chosen for this study. Section one restates the purpose of this research and the questions being asked during this inquiry. Section two discusses the selection and rationale for the method design. Section three presents the data sources, data collection and analysis strategies. Lastly, section four addresses how this research minimizes issues of bias and error.

Purpose of Research and Research Questions

As noted in chapter I, this study will address the effective elements of an internal college readiness program. The findings of this research and also the recommendations from the literature will add to the existing body of knowledge concerning the effective elements of internal college readiness programs in schools with a high population of low-income students. Given the purpose of this inquiry, and keeping in mind that in this study the researcher will base any recommendations on both the extant literature and on the local data collected at KIPP High School, both literature based and site based questions are included in the following list of potential research questions:

Literature Based Question:

1. What are the components of the college readiness program that are most influential for low-income high students pursuing higher education?

Site Based Question

2. To what extent do KIPP school staff and alumni perceptions confirm what the literature describes as influential components of internal college readiness programs?

Selection of and Rationale for Design

Selection of research design. The research design chosen for this study is a mixed-methods design. Mixed methods studies combine the qualitative and quantitative approaches into the research methodology and analysis of a single study (Creswell, 1994; Creswell & Plano Clark, 2007; Tashakkori & Teddlie, 1998). More specifically a triangulation mixed methods design will be used, a type of design in which different but complementary data will be collected on the same topic. In this study, focus group interviews will be used to gage the school staff's perceptions of the important components of an internal college readiness program that will positively influence the college access for low-income students. Concurrent with this data collection, quantitative surveys will be distributed to the students who have graduated from KIPP high school and qualify as low-income, to explore student perceptions of what components of the internal college readiness program most increased their access to college. The reason for collecting both qualitative and quantitative data is to bring together the strengths of both forms of research to corroborate results.

Rationale for the research design. This research aims to detect the successful practices and principles of an effective college readiness program. Similar studies on the effective principles use quantitative methods to measure the overall effectiveness of the program, measuring how many of the students enroll into institutions of higher education after high school, and just listing the practices and principles that these programs incorporate into their program. Another common method is using qualitative methods to gage students, teachers, and faculty attitudes on the practices that make the program effective. While both research methods are somewhat adequate indicators of effective principles, a combination of the two research methods would provide a more comprehensive explanation of the effective practices and principles of college readiness programs by making note of trends and generalizations as well as an exhaustive knowledge of the participant's perspectives (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2007). For this reason this study will be incorporating a mixed-methods approach. Figure 2 illustrates Creswell and Plano-Clark's (2007) visual of the triangulation method design.

Figure 2. Creswell and Plano-Clark's Visual of the Triangulation Method Design



Site Selection. KIPP Gaston College Preparatory is a free open-enrollment public charter school located in Gaston, North Carolina. Gaston is a low-income rural area in North Carolina located halfway between Newport News, Virginia and Raleigh, North Carolina. **The operating framework of the school is that** “all students, regardless of race or socio-economic background, will achieve at superior levels when taught in a high-quality way” (KIPP Gaston). Not to mention that all students will be expected to graduate from high school and then attend and graduate from the college of their choice (KIPP Gaston).

KIPP High School has an enrollment of approximately 264 students and 62% of which qualify as low – income students indicated by their free or reduced lunch waivers (KIPP Gaston). KIPP Pride High was opened in 2005 and in the spring of 2009 they had a 100% college matriculation rate for their graduating class (KIPP Gaston). Recently the KIPP website was able to report that “100% of KIPP Gaston seniors are headed to college in the fall of 2010--for the second year in a row” (KIPP Gaston).

KIPP Gaston College Preparatory is an ideal setting for conducting this research. KIPP qualifies as a school with a majority of low-income students who are enrolled in a school’s based college readiness program.

Methods for Reviewing and Analyzing the Literature

Using thematic and categorical development and analysis the researcher used the literature to investigate the necessary components of an intern college readiness program. The researcher first sought to understand characteristics of internal college readiness programs. Second, the researcher noted what literature identified as common themes of successful college readiness programs. Lastly, the researcher continued to read other literature on college readiness and classified that literature with the framework previously developed.

The literature selected focused on building a college readiness program in high schools with low-income students. Once it was discovered that necessary components included: college guidance counselors, parental involvement, building a college culture and academic preparation the focus went to finding what the literature revealed about these components and why they were important. Next, the researcher searched for case studies that intertwined all of these components to assess how they did or did not work together.

Once the literature was collected then it was grouped by component (college guidance counselors, parental involvement, building a college culture and academic preparation). Having the literature grouped by components allowed the researcher to assess the features of each component; for example in academically preparing students for college should the responsibility fall completely on teachers or should higher education partners also be responsible.

Role of the Researcher

The proposed role of the researcher is to conduct the qualitative focus group interview with the teachers and college guidance counselor members at KIPP High School, distribute the quantitative surveys to alumni students, and also observe the KIPP high school setting.

Data Collection Strategies and Data Sources

Data Collection Strategies

Strategies for gaining access to research site. As with most research, the researcher is required to gain permission to collect an individual's or site's data (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2007). In order to complete this study the researcher will have to gain access to KIPP high school; this can be done by contacting the superintendent of the district and also the KIPP high school administration.

Focus group interview. "Focus group interviews are groups of people, selected based on their relevance interviewed together, prompting a discussion to explore a topic" (Babbie, 2010, pg. 322-323). For this study two focus group interviews will occur. One will occur with the teacher staff at KIPP high school. Participation in this focus group will be voluntary and the researcher will aim to include teachers from all academic disciplines and grade levels to best assess what is done throughout the school to achieve academic participation and college culture.

The second interview will consist of the college guidance counselors at KIPP high school to assess what counseling sessions consist of between counselors and students and counselors and parents. Also to assess what is being done outside of the classroom to prepare students for college.

Quantitative survey. A quantitative study will be distributed to alumni students to appraise student perceptions of the internal college readiness program. Questionnaires will target alumni student beliefs on each of the components of an internal college readiness program based on the components revealed in the literature. The questionnaire will ask students to rank each component based on what was most relevant to their college matriculation.

Observations. The researcher will conduct unobtrusive research, research that does not affect the research setting (Babbie, 2010), through observations. Observations are important because Corwin and Tierney (2007) state that a school's college culture should be visible upon entrance to the school. Based on Corwin and Tierney's (2007) recommendation the researcher will attempt to observe the internal college readiness program without interacting with the participants.

Data Sources

Data sources are individuals or objects that provide data for analysis (Babbie, 2010). This study will focus on the following data sources:

Teachers. Holland & Hinton, (2009) state that teachers are also important because they serve as the basis of social support, inside the school, for students looking for assistance in applying to institutions of higher education. Teachers are also responsible for providing the students with academically rigorous courses that can better prepare them for college classes. This study recognizes the teacher responsibility in college readiness programs and would therefore propose to hold a focus group interview to determine what efforts are being made by the teachers inside and outside of the classroom to advance the mission of the college readiness program.

School college guidance counselors. The primary responsibility of the guidance counselor is to provide students with college information and resources (McClafferty, McDonough, & Nunez, 2002). Given their responsibility, the researcher in this study will hold an interview with the KIPP college guidance counselor to determine what is being done within the school to provide the students with college information and resources.

Students. The overall research on student experiences in college readiness programs focus on student outcomes from the program, whether or not the students matriculate to institutions of higher education. This study will take a different approach by distributing a quantitative survey aimed at determining the student's views on effective practices and principles of the KIPP college readiness program.

Field Notes. During observations, field notes will be taken while the researcher visits the KIPP high school campus. The researcher will use the field notes taken during different classes, college advising sessions, staff meetings and parent workshops (if available) to analyze how the day to day occurrences in the school compare to the literature's ideas about internal college readiness programs. Observations and field notes also include looking at the decorations throughout the school, school website, and paper publications.

McClafferty, McDonough, & Nunez, (2002) state that setting clear expectations for college attendance in mission statements is another way to establish a college culture within a school. By looking at the website the researcher will be able to determine if the school is setting an expectation for a college culture within the school. Also by evaluating the website, the research can evaluate the context under which words like college are used. This will provide a general sense of the school's belief about college attendance.

Table 1 presents a chart version of the data sources being used in this study:

Data Source	Collection Strategy	Rationale	Anticipated Data
Teachers	Focus Group Interview	Teachers documented experiences in an internal college readiness program are a first hand account on what is going on in the school classroom	Data on how college readiness issues were addressed in classroom.
School college guidance counselor	Focus Group Interview	Can provide first hand account about college culture in school – especially outside of the classroom	Data on how college readiness issues were addressed outside of the program
Students	Quantitative Survey	Can best describe the end results of the program. Can also determine a relations	Data on which aspects of the college readiness had the greatest impact
Filed Notes	Qualitative Observation Analysis	Can describe the schools overall mission to evaluate if in fact school qualifies as an internal college readiness program.	Data on the mission and overall goal of the college readiness program

Data Analysis Strategies

The unit of analysis is the “what or whom being studied” (Babbie, 2010, pg. 98). The unit of analysis for this study is the social network producing social capital for low-income students to increase their access to higher education unit of analysis this investigation asks college guidance counselors, faculty, and students to analyze their experiences in a school-based college readiness program.

Transcription. The qualitative portions of this study, two focus group interviews, will use the actual responses from the teacher and college guidance counselor interviews to formulate the data. Therefore, other interviews will have to be recorded and once they are finished they need to be transcribed. Transcribing the data will best allow the researcher to code the data received in order to analyze what factors the teachers and college guidance counselor recognize as effective principles and factors of the school based college readiness program. The researcher will note what the overall staff defines as a college readiness program and compare their definition to the literature’s definition. The researcher will also listen to their strategies for building a college culture to assess any similarities to the literatures strategies. For example, do they mention college fairs, college visits, and college decorations in the hallway?

Coding. Coding is the process where raw data are transformed and standardized by grouping evidence and labeling ideas so that they reflect broader perspectives (Babbie, 2010; Creswell & Plano Clark, 2007). This is the data analysis strategy that will be used for the observed data. By coding observed data the researcher will be able to label the field notes based on the how it fits each component of an internal college readiness program detailed I the literature. This will give the researcher more background on how the KIPP high school internal college readiness program compares to what the literature describes as an effective college readiness program.

Quantification. Quantification is the process of changing raw data into a numerical format in order for a computer program, the most common method of quantitative analysis, to analyze (Babbie, 2010). The quantitative portion, student surveys, will use multivariate analysis to isolate the relationship between key independent variables, the components of college readiness programs, and the college matriculation outcomes after controlling for other variables, which have yet to be identified.

Ethical Considerations

This research will adhere to Bouma and Ling's (2004) definition of a researcher who is "considerate, does nothing to injure, harm or disturb the participants in research, keeps data collected on individuals and groups secure, accurately record information and reports the findings of the research in a public manner" (p. 203). To ensure the integrity of this study, the researcher will be aware of any unethical practices and adhere to several rules of conduct in order to observe all ethical considerations.

Firstly, all participation will be voluntary and informed (Babbie, 2010). The researcher will ensure this by using a consent form, which will be developed and distributed to all participants prior to any data collection. The surveys that will be distributed by Internet to the graduated students will have a section at the top of the first page that includes a consent clause and requires signatures. The consent form will include (1) a summary of the study; (2) the purpose and objectives of the research; (3) who will have access to the uninterrupted data (research and researcher's advisor); (4) the manner in which results would be reported and distributed; and (5) the information about whom to contact if participants had questions or concerns about the researcher's conduct. Any data from participants who have not filled out and signed consent forms will not be included in this study.

Secondly, all answers will be kept confidential, and anonymous to the researcher's institution and the general public. This will be especially true for the information provided by the students and for the information provided by the teachers and college guidance counselor of the school, measures will be taken to ensure that quotes remain unidentifiable. The research will make efforts to present the findings in a non-threatening manner to the participants and institutions with which the participants are related.

Thirdly, as this is a mixed methods research design that aims to use two data sources to corroborate the findings from the literature there is a possibility that the quantitative and qualitative data sets do not agree (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2007). Creswell and Plano Clark (2007) suggest collecting additional data or even reevaluation however as an ethical consideration the researcher has a responsibility to report all findings.

Lastly, the research will protect all raw data by storing them in a secure location. This information will only be available to the researcher and the researchers' research advisor.

Strategies for Minimizing Bias and Error

Bias, according to Babbie (2010), is the "quality of a measurement that tends to result in a misrepresentation of what is being measured in a particular direction (p. G1). Provided that studies using concurrent mixed methods research are prone to bias (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2007), here are the strategies that the researcher will use to minimize bias and error:

Triangulation. Triangulation is a concept based on the assumption that a mixture of methods would counterbalance any bias from individual research methods, data sources, or researchers, as the researcher is combining different but complementary data on the same topic (Jick, 1979 as cited in Creswell, 1994; Creswell & Plano Clark, 2007). As this study is based on self-reliance data, which is subject to participant bias, a triangulation of research methods serves as a method of reducing bias.

Interview guides. As the interviewer might bring his or her own biases to the research study, the researcher will implement an interview guide documenting the questions and sample probe questions to be asked during the interview. Interview guides are likely to minimize the potential for any such biases (Rodgers, 2007).

Using advisor review. Another strategy for minimizing bias and error in the study will be to have any data to be collected and interpreted checked after collection and interpretation by the researcher's research advisor. This review of data will assure that all ethical concerns were met and that the researcher bias is not present within the study.

Pre-existing notions. It is important that this study not assume that the participants view the practices of the program as successful or even as positive, despite the noted success of the program. In order to maintain a neutral position this study will provide two constants to provide context for the participants to evaluate their experiences; a) their relationship with other program participants (students, teachers, college guidance counselors, etc) and b) the information and college resources they were or were not provided.

Anticipated Limitations of Future Research

Access to Students

One of the main limitations of this study is going to be the collection of data from the students who have already graduated from the KIPP Gaston College Prep. The difficulty arises in finding a method to contact these students and also ensuring that they completely fill out the survey. It is expected that some participants will not return the survey.

Reliance on Self-Reported Information

This study requires that school staff, teachers, and recent graduates of KIPP high school report their experiences in the school based college readiness program. While this study has to rely heavily on self-reported information in order to formulate data, participants might over emphasize both their positive and/or negative experiences and over-emphasis in the data results in research that is plagued with bias. Nevertheless, this study will exercise all measures to reduce participant bias.

Furthermore, this specific research design, data convergence, requires that qualitative and quantitative data sets be converged during interpretation (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2007). This requires that equal weight be placed on data sets from each methodology.

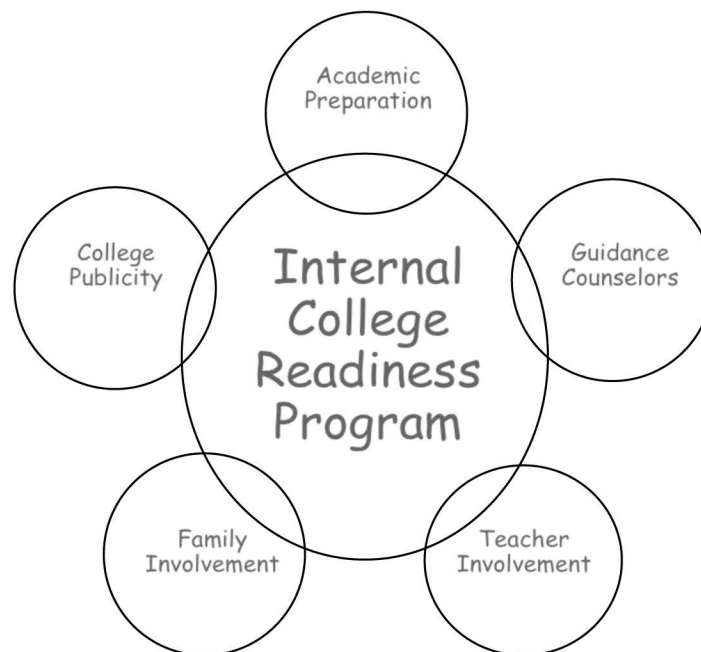
Findings from the Literature, Conclusions and Recommendations

This chapter includes a summary of the study that centers on the initial questions which motivated the study, findings from the literature, conclusions based on the literature, and further research recommendations for further study.

Findings from Literature

After reading a bevy of literature on college readiness programs for low-income students several factors have emerged as being necessary for successful results: academic preparation; guidance counselors; teacher involvement; family involvement and college publicity. Figure 3 presents a comprehensive model of internal college readiness programs.

Figure 3. Comprehensive Model of Internal College Readiness Programs



Finding 1: Academic preparation. Academic preparation is important because if students do not have sufficient grades to enter college they might not apply, or might apply but not meet the academic requirement to gain acceptance. Also academic preparation is important for college persistence as oftentimes student's dropout because they do not feel able to keep up with the rigor of the classes. In order to increase academic preparation guidance counselors should be assisting students with their course selection (Corwin & Tierney, 2007). Teachers can also incorporate college level work in the school curriculum. Schools should also be presenting students to earn college credit while still in high school either through AP classes or with dual enrollment in neighboring colleges. Lastly, for those students who are below school academic requirements, efforts should be made by the school and the student to provide tutoring resources.

Finding 2: College guidance counselors. The College Guidance Counselor main responsibility is to provide students with the resources necessary to learn about, apply to, and enroll in college. This includes setting up a college resource center that can serve as the "hub of college guidance and activities" (Corwin & Tierney, 2007). Guidance counselors should also make sure that teachers and staff are aware of what is going on with the college process so that there is alignment within the entire school. For the students and parents, guidance counselors should be providing workshops that educate on financial aid and other topics that tend to be a barrier on college access for the students in the school. College talk, which is the next factor to be discussed, is also the responsibility of the guidance counselor along with the school administrators.

Finding 3: Teacher involvement. Teacher involvement is important to internal college readiness programs because outside of the academic preparation, teachers also serve as another source of college guidance. As individuals who have the college experience they serve as actors capable of producing social capital necessary. In essence teachers have the ability to act as parental figures for students whose parents have not attended college providing them with the social capital necessary for them to learn about the college experience firsthand (McClafferty, McDonough & Nunez, 2002). As an actor in the network and as a form of social support students should be able to depend on their teachers to not only provide them with academic preparation but also with basic college guidance. This can only be done if there is clear communication and trust between student and teacher (Holland and Hinton, 2009).

Finding 4: Parental involvement. Parental involvement is necessary because it takes school and parental guidance to foster college plans (Holland & Hinton 2009). Low-income students often do not receive this parental involvement because their parents have not attended college and feel as though they cannot be of service to their children (Radcliffe & Stephens, 2003; McClafferty, McDonough & Nunez, 2002). In building a college culture, schools should be presenting a welcoming environment for parents to come in and learn about the college going process alongside their children. Parents should feel welcome to come in ask about what is going on at school and workshops for parents should be held to inform them about the college process (Radcliffe & Stephens, 2003; McClafferty, McDonough & Nunez, 2002).

Finding 5: College Publicity. College publicity is the ever-present reminders in a school about college. Corwin and Tierney (2007) state that a schools culture is present as soon as one steps on the school's campus and can be seen in the hallway decorations and interaction between people in the school. College publicity describes how schools can implement a college culture in their school; consisting of college posters, college newsletters; college decorations in the classrooms; a place in the school where college acceptances are displayed; and having alumni coming back to talk to current students (McClafferty, McDonough & Nunez, 2002; Corwin & Tierney, 2007).

This framework of academic preparation, college guidance counselor, college talk, family involvement, and resources provided will be used to analyze the KIPP schools model of academic preparation for the students in the school. Also the results gathered from the staff and student perceptions will be compared and corroborated with the findings from the literature.

Conclusions

It is the hope of the researcher that the results of this study will serve as a comprehensive examination of a successful internal college readiness programs which will in turn serve as a blue print for other schools with a high population of low-income students looking to increase college access for their students. As this is merely a proposal for a study to be conducted in the future, there has been no data collection to measure student and school staff perceptions of internal college readiness programs; however, conclusions can be drawn on the literature based question.

Literature Based Question. In this study the literature based question is: What are the components of an internal college readiness program that are most influential for low-income high students pursuing higher education? Based on the literature the important components of an internal college readiness program are: academic preparation; the guidance counselor; teacher involvement; parental involvement; and college publicity. These components along with a clear focus of college going, motivated and committed students and adapting to the needs of the school, students and community create a successful internal college readiness program (Perna & Swail, 2006).

The literature also illuminated the importance of embedding these factors in a network producing social capital (Coleman, 1988; Gonzalez, Stoner & Jovel, 2001; Lin, 2005; Perna, 2005; Portes, 2003). Social capital theory allows for the researcher to identify the specific components that produce social capital and interpret which components produce more social capital than the others.

Future Recommendations

In order to create a blue print for successful internal college readiness programs the following recommendations would be valuable:

Comparison of two or more programs. Future research should include a study comparing two reputedly successful internal college readiness program to analyze if there are more essential components. Also comparing programs, especially programs where the low-income student body make-up is different, either by race or geographic location, will allow researchers to determine different need for different types of students.

Combination of Internal and External programs. While this study highlighted some of the benefits of external college readiness program, future research should study students who attend a high school qualifying as an internal college readiness program but are also enrolled in an external college readiness program to assess if the access to higher education is heightened for that student.

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