An Examination of the Effectiveness of the 30/30 Program on High School Students' Academic Performance, Attendance, Behavior and On-time Graduation

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ABSTRACT

In recent years, many at-risk high school students are showing minimal academic achievement. At-risk students in the United States have been described as a population that needs proper guidance and attention (Ladson-Billings, 2006). The purpose of this mixed methods study was to assess the effectiveness of the 30/30 Program in increasing students' academic achievement, school attendance, behavior, and on-time graduation rate (4 years).

The 30/30 Program is a mentoring program that was developed by the principal of a public high school. The 30/30 Program was staffed by five adults who worked with 30 at-risk students from the beginning of their sophomore year until graduation, i.e., 30 months. The program was designed to help at-risk students increase their chances of graduating on time. Academic performance (Grade Point Average), school attendance, behavior, and graduation data were collected from freshman year to senior year.

The study utilized a longitudinal, non-experimental research design to determine whether the group who participated in the 30/30 Program had greater improvements in academic performance, school attendance, behavior, and graduation rate than a group of 20 at-risk students who were eligible for the program but did not participate. No significant differences in the groups were found in the academic performance or attendance records at baseline (freshman year) or in any of the three subsequent years. While the intervention group had high baseline behavior incidents (38) compared to the comparison group (6), the number modulated in the following two years to 19 and 23, respectively, and ended lower for the senior year (4). After the

baseline year, the comparison group had similar numbers of behavior incidents to those of the intervention group. The graduation rate was not significantly different for the groups. While the results were disappointing, it may be that the intervention group's high number of behavior incidents at baseline indicates a group at greater risk for academic performance than the comparison group who may have achieved and attended more readily even without the help of the 30/30 Program.

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GENERAL AUDIENCE ABSTRACT

A mentoring program called the 30/30 Program was developed by a high school principal to help students who have a difficult time staying in school and graduating. The program was designed to increase academic achievement, school behavior, school attendance, and graduation for students. The 30/30 program had five adults who worked with 30 high-risk students beginning in their sophomore year. The adults continued to work with the students for three years in order to help them graduate on time.

The study examined progress on achievement (grade point average), school attendance, behavior, and graduation rates. The results for these students were compared to results for a similar group of students who were not in the 30/30 Program. The study found no significant differences between the groups at the end of the students' fourth year of high school. This may have been because, in freshman year prior to the start of the program, the 30/30 Program group had many more behavior incidents (38) than the comparison group which had only 6 prior to the beginning of the 30/30 Program. This may have meant that the 30/30 Program students were at greater risk for school failure than the comparison group.

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CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION

Davis (2003) informed us that many educators and administrators throughout the United States are alarmed at the lack of academic achievement of many at-risk students. Ladson-Billings (2006) reported that at-risk children comprised 17% of all public school students, but many school districts report that one-half of all at-risk students that enter the ninth grade do not graduate from high school (Davis, 2003). The factors that contribute to this problem include, but are not limited to, poverty, single-family homes, toxic social environments, and deterioration of values affecting normative behaviors, all of which are causative of an overall lack of desire of these students to succeed socially as well as academically (Davis, 2003; Smith, 2007). The negative consequences of the achievement gap are more acute for at-risk students who are victimized by chronic, systemic levels of poor performance and behavior problems in school.

Social development is a major area in which many at-risk students need assistance. They frequently have developed inappropriate interpersonal skills which are not accepted by the school. Harper (2007), Ladson-Billings (2006), and Gardner and Moran (2006) found that unacceptable social behaviors are directly associated with deprived cultural environments. Schools must find innovative ways to provide appropriate role models for at-risks students to imitate and copy (Tomlinson, 2005).

In recent years, at-risk students in the United States have been described as a population that needs proper guidance and attention (Norris & Phillips, 2003). Parham et al. (2007) reported that 28% to 30% of American youth who were at risk are now unemployed. These statistics highlight the need for schools to seek new and innovative approaches to working with these students.

Background of the 30/30 Program

In 2007, I was a high school principal. After reviewing the academic achievement at the end of the freshmen year for the class of 2010, I decided that a group of at-risk students in the class could benefit from mentoring and other additional supports. I solicited help from a group of four other adults to help begin a program we called the 30/30 Program. I also met with a community member who wanted to lend his help with this population of students. The interested group included a teacher, the school's parent liaison, the school's career center specialist, and me, the school principal. The group formed and became the facilitators of the 30/30 Program. The group decided to name the program 30/30 because it was decided that 30 students would be selected from the class of 2010 to be mentored for 30 months (10 months during each of the three remaining school years) until graduation. The adult facilitators planned activities, both academic and social, attended field trips, and met with the students on a regular basis to provide mentoring regarding academics, behavior, and attendance to the group of students. The ultimate goal was to get them to graduate from high school on-time.

The students were placed into four mentor groups. Each group had an adult leader to review grades, attendance, and behavior with each student once a month. During monthly meetings, students were provided lessons on how to improve in each of the areas. Students were recognized among the group each time they improved in the goal areas.

Problem Statement

Achievement deficiencies among at-risk students must be addressed. Researchers have debated the causes of the achievement gap between at-risk students and their peers and suggested what can be done to help close the gap. This study addresses the use of a non-traditional approach to help at-risk high school students who are not succeeding academically and are

among those that often leave high school without the proper skills to compete in the diverse global workforce of the 21st century (Nelson et al., 2005; Wilson & McBrier, 2005). Although differentiated academic programs have become available in the past few decades, researchers continue to debate the effectiveness of these programs to meet the needs of students at all skill levels (Torgesen et al., 2007). Thus, the effectiveness of nontraditional instructional strategies must be determined (Dede, Korte, Nelson, Valdez, & Ward, 2007).

This study was designed to evaluate the effectiveness of an innovative instructional strategy called the 30/30 Program. This program was implemented by five adults who worked with 30 at-risk students from the beginning of their sophomore year until graduation (i.e., for 30 months) with the goal of helping the at-risk students graduate on time. Participating students' academic achievement, and attendance records were analyzed to determine whether there was an increase in academic achievement and improved attendance upon participation in the 30/30 Program. Additionally, disciplinary incidents were studied to identify whether student behavior of the participating at-risk students improved. The results of this study may be used to determine how mentorship and involvement with at-risk students through a variety of activities can affect their academic performance and help them graduate on time from high school.

Significance of the Study

This study examined the effectiveness of the 30/30 Program on the academic achievement, school attendance, behavior, and on-time graduation of high school students. The findings are useful in informing high school teachers and leaders about effective techniques to increase students' overall academic performance as well as their school attendance.

This study is important for several reasons. First, understanding the relationship between the 30/30 Program and students' achievement, attendance, behavior, and on-time graduation can

help researchers build on this body of knowledge for future studies. Pertinent information can be gained regarding what areas of educational programs and pedagogical designs are needed to positively affect the academic achievement of students (Nelson et al., 2005; Torgesen et al., 2007). Third, schools within the state can collaborate and implement initiatives gleaned from study results that will help at-risk students attain new levels of academic achievement (Nelson et al., 2005) and give them a strong foundation for successful life experiences (Smith, 2007).

Delimitations

Delimitations refer to the factors that the researcher can decide to include or not include in the study. These factors limit the ability to generalize the results of the study beyond the actual population. This study involved students of ABC School in XYZ County, Virginia and focused on examining the effectiveness of the 30/30 Program on the academic achievement, attendance, behavior, and on-time graduation of high school students. The data collected from school databases were reviewed to ensure credibility, consistency, and accuracy. Demographic data were collected from the participants for use in developing recommendations for future study.

Research Questions and Hypotheses

Five research questions and hypotheses were formulated for this study. They include the following:

Research Question 1: How did the final academic grades of the participants in the 30/30 Program differ from those of the comparison group?

Research Question 2: How did the school attendance of the participants in the 30/30 Program differ from that of the comparison group?

Research Question 3: How did the number of reported disciplinary incidents of the participants in the 30/30 Program differ from those of the comparison group?

Research Question 4: How did the graduation rates of the participants in the 30/30 Program differ from those of the comparison group?

Research Question 5: What are the perceptions of the adult facilitators and student participants regarding the effectiveness of the 30/30 Program?

Theoretical Framework

Two central theories inform the theoretical framework for this study: the theory of differentiated education and Gardner's (2006) theory of multiple intelligences. The theory of differentiated instruction posits that, in any given classroom, student needs are likely to be diverse, so different students may require different instructional practices in order to maximize their learning potential (Carolan & Guinn, 2007). The theory of differentiated instruction is the educational community's answer to the traditional one-size-fits-all model of education rather than adjust to the unique needs of different students (Tomlinson & Jarvis, 2006).

The theory of differentiated instruction has roots in the second theory underpinning this study's theoretical framework: the theory of multiple intelligences (Gardner, 2006; Gardner & Moran, 2006). The theory of multiple intelligences posits that every human processes information in unique ways based on their experience and context (Schutt, 2009). Together, the theories of multiple intelligences and differentiated education form a strong conceptual framework for the design of the 30/30 Program which had facilitators paired with individual students to focus on their academic achievement, behavior, and attendance.

Summary

This descriptive, longitudinal research study was designed to assess the effectiveness of the 30/30 Program in increasing at-risk students' academic achievement, school attendance, behavior, and on-time graduation. Chapter 2 includes a review of the literature related to at-risk students' achievement and intervention strategies considered important in addressing the educational needs of at-risk students. Chapter 3 includes a description of the methodology of the study including the sample, data collection, and data analysis. Chapter 4 includes study findings. Chapter 5 includes a discussion of the findings and recommendations for further research.

CHAPTER 2 LITERATURE REVIEW

This literature review includes a discussion of the pervasive gaps in academic achievement based on race, ethnicity, and socioeconomic status and various efforts and components that have been demonstrated to address those gaps. The literature presented in this review is drawn from the following EBSCO databases: Academic Search Premier, MasterFILE Premier, ERIC, PsycINFO, and PsycARTICLES. Keywords used either individually or in conjunction include: *students, teachers, principals, education, high schools, secondary schools, academic, achievement, performance, achievement gap, African Americans, minority, learning communities, tutoring, mentoring, at-risk, motivation, expectations*, and *success*.

Achievement Gaps

The passage of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 marked the first formal effort by the federal government to address pervasive gaps in academic achievement based on race, ethnicity, and socioeconomic status (Barton & Coley, 2009). A year later, in 1966, the publication of the Coleman Report generated heated debate among educators about the conclusion that family background characteristics superseded school characteristics in explaining the documented disparities in academic performance (Hoy, Tarter, & Woolfolk Hoy, 2006). More than four decades later, there is ample documentation of a myriad of factors related to economic disadvantage within and outside of the educational environment that undermine academic achievement (Barton & Coley, 2009).

Many researchers have documented the underperformance of African American and Latino students (Balfanz & Byrnes, 2006; Fleischman & Heppen, 2009; Flores, 2007; Walker, 2007; Wise, 2009). Balfanz and Byrnes (2006) conducted a series of analyses of mathematics performance in low-income, high minority enrollment middle schools. They found that the

proportion of students making significant gains in mathematics achievement was exceeded by the proportion who were losing ground and falling further behind most of their peers. Approximately one-quarter to one-third of middle school students were advancing more than 20 percentiles on state mathematics assessments while the other two-thirds to three-quarters were losing at least two to three percentiles. The analyses revealed that a convergence of teacher and student behaviors underlie the disparities in performance. Specifically, the group of students with the most impressive progress had attendance rates of 95% or higher, had behavior ratings around the "excellent" mark, and invested intensive effort in mathematics. Among students in this group, an outstanding 77% caught up to their peers while in middle school.

The overarching conclusion of Balfanz and Byrnes (2006) was low-SES students who are underperforming in middle school mathematics seem to follow one of two drastically different trajectories. On one side are the students who enjoy significant gains. The factors associated with their success include a succession of good teachers and educational successes, enhanced self-confidence in mathematics, increased personal effort, and better attendance. These students not only make dramatic gains in mathematics performance, but many go on to high school performing above grade level in mathematics. These students exemplify the concept of academic self-efficacy and resilience (Speight, 2010). Unfortunately, these resilient learners comprise only a minority of the students who began middle school as under-performers in mathematics (Balfanz & Byrnes, 2006). Instead, most of the student underperformers fall farther behind grade level, "unprepared to succeed in challenging high school courses without substantial and sustained doses of extra help" (p. 156). These students' behaviors are certainly a factor in their poor performance; the students display low attendance, negative classroom behaviors, and negligible effort. The strategies recommended by Balfanz and Byrnes (2006) for

closing achievement gaps in mathematics are consistent with the educational literature in general. These strategies include a strong schoolwide mathematics instructional program, substantial increases in teacher training and professional support (including peer coaching), and organizational redesign strategies such as team teaching and learning communities. The unfortunate reality is that, despite the many proven and promising innovations with the capacity to significantly improve the academic performance of low-income urban youth, schools that have adopted best practices are the exception rather than the norm (Darling-Hammond & Friedlaender, 2008).

Tracking policies and practices have been widely implicated in the mathematics achievement gap (Boaler, 2006; Burris & Welner, 2005; Flores, 2007). African American and Latino students are systematically tracked into less advanced mathematics classes and provided with fewer opportunities for stimulating and enriching learning experiences.

Effective High School Reform

Concerted efforts to narrow inequities in academic achievement have led to a growing body of literature (Barton & Coley, 2009; Fleischman & Heppen, 2009; Hoy et al., 2006) on proven and promising practices for improving the academic performance of students labeled "at risk." Hoy et al. (2006) discuss differentiated instructional practices that are implemented to increase the academic performance of at-risk students.

By the end of the 1970s, compelling evidence showed that the following school characteristics were associated with superior academic performance: strong principal leadership, high expectations for student success, emphasis on basic skills instruction, a conducive learning environment, and frequent and systematic evaluation of students (Hoy et al., 2006). Highly effective schools, typically urban schools serving low-income minority students, drove the

effective schools research of the 1980s and drew attention to the role of the principal as instructional leader (Ylimaki, Jacobson, & Drysdal, 2007). In their study of principals in the U.S., Australia, and England striving to create positive learning environments in challenging, high-poverty schools, Ylimaki et al. (2007) found the U.S. principals to be under the greatest degree of pressure. These principals reacted by turning the external mandates for accountability into a vehicle for directing faculty, students, and parents toward higher goals for academic achievement.

Fleischman and Heppen (2009) argued that the assessment and accountability mechanisms of standards-based school reform have acted as a "dynamic engine, driving the search for demonstrably more effective programs and practices" for turning around low-performing schools (p. 107). At the high school level, however, school leaders face particularly daunting tasks including poor academic achievement of students entering high school and high dropout rates (Fleischman & Heppen, 2009).

Fleischman and Heppen (2009) advocated for models such as academies and learning communities that have transformed large, impersonal urban high schools with low academic performance and high dropout rates into highly successful model programs. Similarly, Darling-Hammond and Friedlaender (2008) laud the small learning academies that are appearing in low-income urban communities and providing students, including those at risk for school failure, with new opportunities for educational and career success. Darling-Hammond and Friedlander refer to the traditional large comprehensive high school as the "factory model" (p. 16).

Fleischman and Heppen (2009) acknowledged that restructuring complex organizations is a challenging enterprise. As the effective schools movement demonstrated, complete reorganization is not an essential factor in creating high-performance schools in low-income

communities. Some large comprehensive high schools with high proportions of minority students have successfully narrowed achievement gaps between White and African American or Latino students. These schools are characterized, not surprisingly, by high expectations for student achievement (Billig, Jaime, Abrams, Fitzpatrick, & Kendrick, 2005). Additional features include providing learning supports to assist students and placing an emphasis on accountability. Successful schools have provided an atmosphere of collaboration and optimism (Billig, et al., 2005). Another key feature that contributes to successful schools is greater personalization for students including positive interactions with school staff (Darling-Hammond & Friedlander, 2008).

Fleischman and Heppen (2009) acknowledge that there are many available school reform models that vary tremendously in their approaches to accomplishing the goal of improving academic performance. They emphasize that, in order to be successful, the program must be matched to the intended goals. In contrast to Balfanz and Byrnes (2006) who focus on teacher preparation and training and specific academic interventions, Fleishman and Heppen delineated five broad reform outcomes to consider in selecting the most appropriate model for improving academic performance.

The first outcome is a personalized and orderly learning environment, which coincides with Darling-Hammond and Friedlaender's (2008) emphasis on personalization (Fleischman & Heppen, 2009). Indeed, one of the key responsibilities of an effective instructional leader is creating a disciplined, mutually respectful atmosphere conducive to learning (Ylimaki et al., 2007). A personalized and orderly learning environment can be especially critical in a large high school where an impersonal atmosphere can prevent students from receiving individualized academic support and may inadvertently foster unruly, if not violent, behavior (Fleischman &

Heppen, 2009). Creating a positive learning environment is consistent with the holistic philosophy that successful schools promote social and emotional learning as well as academic achievement (Balfanz & Byrnes, 2006; Fleischman & Heppen, 2009). Forging close bonds between students and teachers encourages mutual accountability for student success (Darling-Hammond & Friedlaender, 2008). Positive, mutually respectful relationships between students and teachers can be pivotal to the school success of African American students (Booker, 2004; Fenzel & O'Brennan, 2007; Tucker & Herman, 2002).

The second outcome is the capacity to help students who enter high school unprepared for secondary level academic work (Fleischman & Heppen, 2009). Reading assessment results from the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) confirm that in 2013, 22 percent of students entering high school scored *below basic* in reading indicating a substantial proportion of students begin high school without adequate skills (U.S. Department of Education, 2015). Students who lack literacy and reading skills are at particular risk for school dropout. Compared to the focus on struggling young readers, the needs of older students with reading problems have been largely neglected (Bumgardner, 2010; Wise, 2009). To some extent, this neglect may reflect lack of awareness of the scope of the problem. Approximately six million students in middle and high school read below grade level (Wise, 2009). Reading and mathematics interventions for older students have to be tailored to students' personal interests and designed specifically for adolescents (Fleischman & Heppen, 2009; Walker, 2007).

The third outcome outlined by Fleischman and Heppen (2009) is improved instructional content and practice. Strong instructional focus is a hallmark of schools that have narrowed achievement gaps based on SES (Hoy et al., 2006). Fenzel & O'Brennan (2007) noted the effectiveness of schools that stress academic rather than social goals in promoting students'

academic self-sufficiency. Wiggan's (2008) study of Hope Scholarship college students indicated that the students cited their high school teachers' instructional practices as the overriding school factor in their high academic achievement.

The fourth outcome is the capacity to prepare students for life beyond high school (Fleischman & Heppen, 2009). Career academies are designed specifically for this goal. Graduation coaching, an innovative new program, aims at preparing students for the future as do many programs designed and implemented by school counselors (Lacefield et al., 2010; Mason & McMahon, 2009).

The fifth and final outcome is positive change in overtaxed high schools. Fleischman and Heppen (2009) note that low-performing high schools face all the challenges of redesigning a complex organization with the added challenge of succeeding in an environment where human and material resources are already strained. To achieve successful change, these schools may require expert and dedicated leadership, along with more time, more moral and financial support from the district, assistance from external reform organizations, and major changes in school climate and culture. Ongoing professional development tailored to the needs of the school and aligned with district and state standards is an essential feature of schools that support academic excellence for all students (Billig et al., 2001; Smrekar et al., 2001). Strong instructional leadership, change leadership, and distributed leadership maintain the focus on the school's mission and goals while facilitating collaboration among all school stakeholders including faculty, students, parents, and, ideally, community members.

No panacea exists for eliminating the persistent gaps in academic achievement. The strategies used to improve the academic performance of at-risk students occupy a broad spectrum that includes: intensive academic interventions (Cleary, Patten, & Nelson, 2008), adolescent

literacy initiatives (Diamond, Corrin, & Levinson, 2004; Snipes & Horwitz, 2008; Wise, 2008), direct instruction (Grossen, 2002), group counseling and mentoring programs (Bemak, Chi-Ying, & Siroskey-Sabdo, 2005; Bruce, Getch, & Ziomek-Daigle, 2009; Mason & McMahon, 2009; Wyatt, 2009), service learning (Scales, Roehlkepartain, Neil, Kielsmeier, & Benson, 2006), tutoring (Hock, Deshler, & Schumaker, 2001;Nesselrodt & Alger, 2005; Roskosky, 2010); after-school programs (Martin, Martin, Gibson, & Wilkins, 2007; Tucker & Herman, 2002), graduation coaching (Lacefield, Zeller, & Van Kannel-Ray, 2010), elimination of academic tracking (Boaler, 2006; Burris & Welner, 2005), innovative school wide models such as First Things First (Connell, 2003; Connell & Broom, 2004; Connell & Klem, 2006; FTF, 1996), and large urban school restructuring to small academies and learning communities (Darling-Hammond & Friedlaender, 2008; Fleischman & Heppen, 2009). This review will focus on the salient aspects of school reform that were integrated into the 30/30 Program: school climate, counseling and mentoring initiatives, tutoring, positive teacher interactions, dropout prevention programs, and after-school activities.

School Climate

Hoy et al. (2006) coined the term *academic optimism* to denote a school environment characterized by a strong academic emphasis, collective efficacy, and faculty trust. The concept of academic optimism grew out of extensive research on school climate and organizational health, leading to the conclusion that certain features distinguished high-performing and low-performing schools with similar socio-demographic profiles (Hoy et al.). At the same time, Fenzel and O'Brennan (2007) observed that there are few studies of the effects of school climate, as a whole, on the motivation of urban African American students.

Fenzel and O'Brennan (2007) studied an aspect of school climate they referred to as the *school psychological environment* which includes two dimensions: goals and relationships. Goals can be classified as task (or mastery) goals and ego goals. Schools that give precedence to task goals emphasize learning and intellectual development while those that favor ego goals promote social comparison and competition. Task-oriented learning environments have been found to increase students' academic self-efficacy and motivation much more effectively than schools that promote competition among the students (Fenzel & O'Brennan, 2007). The relationship aspects of school psychological climate include student and teacher relationships and students' sense of belonging to the school (Fenzel & O'Brennan, 2007). Sense of belonging is also the central theme of Booker's (2004, 2006, 2007) work with African American students.

Fenzel and O'Brennan (2007) asked 282 economically disadvantaged African American middle school students to rate their school climate on factors related to goal orientation and school relationships. According to the students, a positive school climate is supportive and has rules and regulations that the students consider fair (Fenzel & O'Brennan, 2007). Having teachers and principals who were caring and supportive enhanced the students' motivation to learn and their sense of engagement with academic work. These students' perceptions of the peer social climate at their schools were associated with intrinsic motivation but did not influence the students' academic engagement or academic achievement (Fenzel & O'Brennan, 2009). While acknowledging the importance of social relationships for early adolescents, the researchers noted that relationships with caring, supportive teachers were essential to the success of African American students. Their findings suggest that creating a respectful and supportive learning environment is highly conducive to the academic motivation of at-risk urban African American students. Such schools are characterized by very small classes, an extended school

day for studying and remedial work and, above all, high expectations for students' behavior and academic performance. This school model reflects the features of schools that show promise in reducing achievement gaps and successfully educating students labeled at-risk (Darling-Hammond & Friedlaender, 2008; Fleischer & Heppen, 2009).

Stewart (2008) used the second wave of the National Educational Longitudinal Study (NELS) to study Bronfenbrenner's ecological model to investigate individual and school factors connected with the academic achievement of African American students. Stewart (2008) found school cohesion to be paramount, overriding all the structural and socio-demographic characteristics generally associated with educational outcomes including social problems, predominant minority population, poverty, size, and location. Based on her findings, Stewart (2008) concluded that,

> School contexts in which there was a great deal of cooperation among teachers and administrators, support for students, and clear expectations about the mission of the school appeared to translate into higher levels of achievement irrespective of school social ills. (p. 29)

Hoy et al. (2006) reached virtually the same conclusion in their research on school climate and culture. According to Hoy et al. (2006), although SES remains a significant factor in academic achievement, school organizational features have the power to supersede economic disadvantage in creating a learning environment committed to high academic achievement.

Counseling Interventions

Consistent with the emphasis on accountability in education is the pressure of professional school counselors to provide evidence that their work has an impact on the students' academic performance (Mason & McMahon, 2009). In this endeavor, counselors are also being called on to take a greater leadership role and to act as change agents in the effort to narrow

achievement gaps (Bruce et al., 2009). In response to the radical transformation of their professional roles, counselors are developing innovative programs for helping at-risk and underperforming students.

Bruce et al. (2009) investigated the impact of a group counseling intervention designed to improve the performance of African American students on the Georgia high school graduation tests (GHSGT). The group counseling intervention was targeted for African American students who were taking the tests for the first time. Out of 45 eleventh grade students eligible for the counseling program, 15 students decided to participate (Bruce et al., 2009). The participants were assessed on three measures developed by the lead researcher: the *Student Self-Assessment of School Success Behaviors and Attribution* (administered throughout the program), a school climate survey, and a group summative evaluation. In addition, all participants were provided with GHSGT review materials and instructions for accessing additional review materials online. Participating students attended eight counseling sessions with no booster sessions.

Test scores of the counseling program's African American participants showed positive results on the GHSGT (Bruce et al., 2009). Of the 15 students, 12 (80%) passed all four sections of the GHSGT and all 15 students passed the English language arts and mathematics sections. Additionally, the school climate survey revealed that the students were highly satisfied with their relationship with the school counselors, although they were dissatisfied with the teachers' and principal's fairness toward African American students especially regarding the teachers' low expectations for the performance of African American students (Bruce et al., 2009). In fact, high expectations on the part of teachers can be pivotal to students' success (Billig et al., 2005; Hoy et al., 2006; Stewart, 2008). Highlighting the change agent role of the counselor, Bruce et al.

(2009) call on school counselors to devise policies and programs designed to change the way teachers and principals interact with African American students.

Mason and McMahon (2009) described an action research project undertaken at an urban middle school. A counseling intervention program for 8th grade students failing three or more courses was designed, implemented, and evaluated by the school counselor after evolving from discussions between the counselor, 8th grade teachers, and the school principal. There was a consensus among the staff that an intervention designed to promote success in academic skills would be the most effective strategy for helping the students improve their grades and prepare them for the state standardized assessment that determined promotion to the next grade.

A total of 33 students (73% African American) completed the counseling intervention (Mason & McMahon, 2009). The students met with the school counselor for 30-minute sessions in small groups every other week. The session began with a recognition segment that included students sharing their accomplishments, counselor sharing students' positive improvements, and peer support of each other. The counselor frequently mentioned teachers' comments about a student's improvements. The students were encouraged to applaud and cheer for one another. After the recognition segment, a specific academic or study skill was presented. The students also met individually with a counselor for personalized counseling. Additional program components included optional tutoring sessions delivered by high school students in a leadership training program, guest presentations on personal and academic motivation, "Most Valuable Player" postcards sent to parents extolling the students accomplishments, and pep rallies to which parents were invited. At the end of the semester, the students' GPAs as well as academic and social competencies showed marked increases. According to Mason and McMahon (2009),

the most important result of the program was that only two of the 33 students were retained in grade.

Bemak et al. (2005) view school-based group counseling as a promising strategy for helping students struggling to deal with the adverse social and environmental effects of urban poverty that surround them. The researchers developed and implemented Empowerment Groups for Academic Success (EGAS) in a high-poverty Midwestern urban high school marked by low academic achievement and high rates of absenteeism, expulsions and suspensions, and teen pregnancies. The first group of EGAS students consisted of seven African American 10th grade girls identified by their teachers. Cultural sensitivity was built into the design, reflecting Tucker and Herman's (2002) philosophy that African American youth benefit most by programs that build on their cultural heritage. The EGAS approach marked a radical departure from prior interventions with its emphasis on empowerment and consideration of the full constellation of factors affecting the students' lives. Greater recognition is now given to the understanding that the achievement gap is influenced by an array of factors related to poverty, many of which are outside the scope of the school (Barton & Coley, 2009). In contrast to highly structured psycho-educational interventions, the EGAS approach uses an unstructured process approach with clearly delineated goals as the most effective strategy for helping the students overcome their daily challenges. Discussion, deep reflection, sharing of feelings and experiences, close interpersonal relationships, and above all, empowerment, were the defining characteristics of the group. Interviews with the girls and letters they wrote at the end of the group revealed the positive psychosocial impact of the group. The girls reported more positive attitudes toward school, better attendance, greater interest in schoolwork, and even aspirations to go to college.

Swain-Bradway (2010) described the High School Behavior Education Program (HS-BEP) which was designed to provide academic and social supports to high school students at risk for failure. The intervention included a modified behavior education program combined with 45-minute study skills classes held two to three times weekly. The researcher conducted a case study of six students at one Pacific Northwest high school which had implemented school-wide behavior support. While the sample was small, the preliminary results showed that HS-BEP had a small to moderate impact on positive behaviors related to academic engagement.

Mentoring

Mentoring has evolved into a primary prevention and intervention strategy for at-risk youth. It is a central component of venerable youth development programs such as Big Sisters and Big Brothers, which pair young protégés with adult mentors to promote youths' positive psychosocial development (de Anda, 2001). A qualitative study conducted by de Anda (2001) evolved from collaboration between a community youth organization and the local fire department in a Los Angeles neighborhood marked by socioeconomic disadvantage, violence, and crime. In the program, Project R.E.S.C.U.E. (Reaching Each Student's Capacity Utilizing Education), the mentor served as a supportive adult role model who fosters the mentee's social and emotional development, helps enhance the mentee's academic performance and career motivation, introduces the mentee to enriching experiences, diverts the mentee away from at-risk behaviors, and instills the mentee with an enhanced sense of self-esteem.

In the first year of the program, 18 mentees of African American and Latino heritage were paired with adult mentors. Asked why they became involved with the program and what they wanted from it, the adolescent mentees overwhelmingly responded that they wanted someone they could talk to freely and openly and who would listen to their concerns (de Anda,

2001). Two of the mentees specifically credited the program with their improved academic performance. While the researchers noted that the adolescents entered the program with different needs and desires, there were several common positive outcomes. The mentees developed powerful bonds with their mentors, which helped them make important changes in the direction of their lives. The mentors also provided the students with learning opportunities that significantly advanced their educational and career aspirations. The mentors became involved with the program to make a difference in the lives of the youths and, according to the mentees, they succeeded in doing so.

Wyatt (2009) presented an evaluation of the Brotherhood, a school-based mentoring program for African American adolescent boys adopted by an urban high school. The Brotherhood espouses Afrocentric principles that emphasize family and community ties, is based on empowerment theory, and is conducted in accordance with the standards of the American School Counselor Association (ASCA). Nguzo Saba's seven principles serve as the foundation of the program: *Umoja* (unity), *Kujichagulia* (self-determination), *Ujima* (collective work and responsibility), *Ujamass* (cooperative economics), *Nia* (purpose), *Kuumba* (creativity), and *Imnnii* (faith). Evaluation of the program during its 5th year of implementation in the Chicago Public Schools indicated that the Brotherhood participants enjoyed higher GPAs than nonparticipants (Wyatt, 2009). Participants disclosed in surveys that they understood the link between academics and real world success, the importance of respect for the self and others, and their need for assistance with decision making, goal setting, and initiating action to reach their personal goals. According to Wyatt, the students' comments indicated they were aware of the advantages of mentorship. At the same time, there appeared to be a need of greater emphasis on life skills and increased collaborative planning between the counselors and the students.

Tutoring

Individual tutoring, which has been used extensively to improve academic performance, has a strong evidence base. Indeed, Slavin stated that, "One-to-one adult-to-child tutoring is one of the most effective instructional strategies known, and it essentially solves the problem of appropriate levels of instruction" (Slavin, cited in Munoz et al., 2008, p. 2). In the classroom setting, peer tutoring has also been used to provide social as well as academic benefits to both participants. Many schools develop innovative tutoring programs tailored to the needs of their specific populations.

One example of tutoring, the Academic Coaching Program, was implemented by a low-income Chicago school to provide academic assistance to 7th and 8th grade students (Nesselrodt & Alger, 2005). Because the cost of tutoring services presents a formidable obstacle for many schools, the Academic Coaching Program recruited and trained university education majors to serve as tutors. The tutoring sessions were closely aligned with the school's academic curriculum and targeted to the needs of at-risk students with the most need of assistance with academic work. During a 3-year period, the number of students ranged from 35 to 50, with a ratio of coaches to students ranging from 1:4 to 1:7.

The program evaluation demonstrated that the students had positive attitudes toward the program and made significant equivalency gains in reading and mathematics (Nesselrodt & Alger, 2005). In view of the fact that the tutoring program participants were underperforming students at high risk for school failure, Nesselrodt and Alger (2005) labeled the progress made by the students positive and remarkable. The researchers attributed the students' impressive progress in reading to the program design. The coaches utilized Socratic inquiry and discussion to hone the students' critical thinking skills. Nesselrodt and Alger (2005) regarded this approach

as a major strength of the program, which was designed to prepare the students for standardized high-stakes tests without compromising their overall intellectual development.

According to Roskosky (2010), the key to a successful tutoring program is that "[t]utoring must be specific and targeted" (p. 68). Roskosky described a tutoring program that consisted of 1-hour tutoring sessions before and after school four days a week plus a tutoring session available during the school day. As the school principal, Roskosky enlisted the "most student-centered teachers" from subjects for which many students needed extra help to lead daily tutoring sessions for 6 weeks (p. 68). Another high school rearranged class schedules to allow for a 30-minute tutoring session before lunch for students in need of academic help. The curriculum director used assessment data to assign students to tutoring in the appropriate subject area(s).

Like Nesselrodt and Alger (2005), Roskosky (Miskinis et al., 2010) turned to university students to ensure a sufficient number of tutors. The tutoring team set up a tutoring center in an unused business lab, initially inviting students to come for assistance at any time on a drop-in basis. The center was very popular with the students whose academic performance improved. Over time, the tutoring program evolved into a focused intervention for students identified with academic difficulties and the tutoring team developed specific support strategies. The tutors maintained close contact with the teachers to assure that the students' performance improved. Roskosky strongly advocated targeted tutoring as an effective strategy for enabling schools to provide each student with the needed degree of support to succeed academically.

Similar to Roskosky's (Miskinis et al., 2010) *targeted tutoring*, Hock et al. (2001) focused on *strategic tutoring*, a model in which "strategies for learning how to learn and perform are taught to students while they receive help with class assignments" (p. 173). The researchers

presented two studies of an after-school strategic program, each one involving a small group of students identified by school counselors as at high risk for school failure. The first study included three 7th and 8th grade students and the second study involved six students in grades 6-9. Each group had one student diagnosed with a learning disability (LD). The tutors were university students who were trained in specific techniques and worked with the students in mathematics and science.

Scores on quizzes and exams for the six students who received the strategic tutoring program were boosted from failing and below average to average and above average scores (Hock et al., 2001). As a result, the students earned higher grades for the semester. The researchers proposed several recommendations for creating an effective after-school tutoring program. First, the aim of the program must be clearly defined. Second, the tutors need specialized, focused training and professional development. Third the students need to devote time and effort to the tutoring program. At least four weeks of consistent attendance was required for improving academic performance. Hock et al. (2001) concluded that the success of strategic tutoring is contingent on a combination of student characteristics and program components.

New York City is the site of many innovative program models that have successfully transformed the learning experience of low-income, minority students (Darling-Hammond & Friedlaender, 2008). By the adoption of teaching models designed to address educational inequities, many high schools have significantly improved the performance of minority students on the New York State Regents examination (Burris & Welner, 2005). Walker (2007) reported on a school-wide initiative that employed peer-led tutoring to boost the mathematics achievement of underperforming students attending a small New York City high school serving

primarily African American and Latino students (Walker, 2007). The collaborative peer-led tutoring program arose in response to the poor mathematics performance of a significant number of students. The program used the following three-pronged approach:

1. a site-based initiative that capitalizes on the mathematical excellence of high-performing students,
2. components to address the teachers' lack of knowledge and understanding of the mathematics performance of urban students, and
3. an overarching goal of developing and enhancing the students' mathematical knowledge, confidence, and interest.

The project began with a thorough assessment of the mathematics teachers' classroom practices and attitudes toward their students (Walker, 2007). An initial professional development session focused on attitudes about mathematics and the importance of high expectations for students' success. Concurrently, the students were surveyed about their attitudes toward mathematics, their peer groups, and their plans for the future. The highest achieving students were interviewed regarding the networks supporting their mathematical excellence. Interviews with high-achievers provide excellent insight into factors linked with the academic success of low-SES minority students.

Regarding the tutoring collaborative, Walker (2007) views this type of tutoring as not only beneficial for boosting the confidence and performance of low-performing students but also for recognizing and building on the success of high-achieving African American and Latino students, who are often ignored since the focus is on underachievers. Peer tutoring has consistently been found to have psychosocial benefits for the tutor. In the case of the high school students, the students displayed adult maturity that developed over the course of the tutoring

program. Forming a learning collaborative that capitalizes on the strengths of talented, high-achieving students ultimately benefits both student and adult participants.

Morales (2010) interviewed high-achieving college students to explore the contributors to their educational success. The students' responses fell into two clusters although the underlying factors were interrelated. The attributes characterizing the students in the first cluster included: willingness or desire to "class jump" (move up in social class); caring, supportive K-12 school personnel; caring, supportive college personnel; sense of responsibility to one's race or ethnic heritage; and a strong future orientation. Students in the second cluster were described by a strong work ethic, persistent, high self-esteem, internal locus of control, attending a school outside of their neighborhood, high parental expectations conveyed by their words and actions, and a mother who models a strong work ethic. Morales (2010) regards the resilience factors identified by the exploration as a springboard for future research with the goal of fostering resilience in students at risk for school failure. Specifically, insight into the interplay of factors that promote resilience can be used to guide the design of programs, services, and interventions in a manner that allows educators to most effectively deploy typically scarce resources.

Wiggan (2008) conducted a similar study of seven recipients of Georgia Hope Scholarships. The group consisted of six females and one male, reflecting the much higher number of girls who receive the Hope. The gender gap in academic achievement between male and female African American students has led to the development of mentoring programs targeting African American boys (Jackson & Mathews, 1999; Royse, 1998; Wyatt, 2009). At the time of the study, all the Hope Scholarship students were attending college (Wiggan, 2008).

The three major contributors to the students' academic success in high school were teachers who created stimulating and engaging learning environments, involvement in

extracurricular activities, and using the Hope Scholarship as an incentive for high academic performance (Wiggan, 2008). Extracurricular activities provided an important mechanism for enhancing students' sense of belonging to school, but participation in extracurricular activities by African American students did not necessarily translate into high academic success (Booker, 2007). The students' recommendations for addressing issues related to school failure and low academic performance centered on three key themes: reforming school finance, improving teachers' classroom instruction, and making higher education more affordable (Wiggan, 2008).

Student-Teacher Interactions

The factor most directly related to boosting the academic performance of low-achievers was the stimulation provided to students by teachers who used interactive teaching strategies, encouraged inquiry and critical thinking, and actively sought to expand the students' social and educational horizons (Wiggan, 2008). Illustrating the powerful impact of excellent teaching, one student praised a Latin teacher—a subject many students would dismiss as irrelevant—for showing the students "life lessons" and making the class personally meaningful (p. 331). Notably, one of the students chose a math teacher as an example of *ineffective* teaching. The teacher was disengaged from the teaching process and, as a result, did not teach material that was essential for building more advanced knowledge. The pivotal role of teachers in promoting the success of urban minority students is a consistent theme in the literature.

Walker (2007) describes a peer tutoring collaborative which involved recruiting teachers, graduate students, and student tutors for the tutoring collaborative. The select group of tutors was composed of five Latina/os and one African American 11th and 12th grade students, three of whom participated in an intensive training seminar. As the semester went on, the collaborative added three 9th grade tutors to work with other 9th graders who were reticent about working with

the older students. Graduate students in mathematics education, including teaching interns, served as "advisors" to the collaborative. The 90-minute tutoring sessions were held after school three days each week. At least one teacher had to be present and the tutors and advisors were required to participate in at least one weekly session.

As described by Walker (2007), the tutors initially "cajoled, disciplined, and admonished tutees about doing their homework, paying attention, and thinking about the mathematics at hand" (p. 60). As the semester progressed, the tutors became more adept and sophisticated in using specific techniques for addressing the tutees' problems. As the program advanced, there was mutual learning by all participants, including the teachers learning from their students. Walker uses the term "collaborative space" to denote the milieu created by the tutors, tutees, advisors, and teachers, which served as a constructive learning environment for mathematical learning (p. 65). Both the tutors and tutees gained confidence as the sessions progressed (Walker, 2007). However, despite all the positive outcomes, Walker observed one lingering issue: "Despite evidence to the contrary, three advisors expressed overwhelmingly negative perceptions of the students' motivation" (p. 65). Furthermore, two advisors asserted, without any evidence to support that claim, that the parents lacked interest and investment in their children's education. Ironically, the advisors remained skeptical of the students' motivation, even despite their own reports attesting to the students' "motivation and diligence" (p. 65). The advisors' attitudes underscore the negative stereotypes surrounding low-income minority students—even in the face of compelling evidence refuting these stereotypes.

Probably the most powerful implication for teachers is the importance of both investing the time and effort into understanding how their students learn and communicating high expectations for achievement. Specifically, Walker (2007) recommends that mathematics

teachers engage their students in dialogues, problem solving, and inquiry-oriented instruction, soliciting the students' own ideas for enhancing the learning environment.

After-School Programs

The Research-Based Model Partnership Program (Model Program) is a culturally sensitive, comprehensive after-school program that has successfully enhanced the academic performance, prosocial behaviors, and adaptive skills of economically disadvantaged African American students (Tucker & Herman, 2002). The Model Program is driven by Tucker's Self-Empowerment Theory (SET), which Tucker devised to guide research and program development geared toward reducing academic and behavior problems among African American youth. The premise of SET is that social realities like racism and socioeconomic inequities are beyond the scope of the school. Therefore, the most effective way to help low-income African American children succeed is to equip them with resiliency skills that will serve them within and outside of the school realm. Tucker and Herman emphasize that this philosophy does not absolve the school or other institutions of the responsibility for addressing social inequities. Rather, SET "recognizes that African American children need special skills to combat social inequalities until social justice is achieved" (Tucker & Herman, 2002, p. 766).

According to the principles of SET, academic and behavioral problems and, by implication, academic success and prosocial behavior are influenced by: (a) self-motivation for academic achievement and social success, (b) perceived self-control over one's behavior and academic success, (c) self-reinforcement for engaging in the appropriate behaviors, (d) adaptive skills for life success, and (e) engagement in successful behavior (Tucker & Herman, 2002). In effect, SET is consistent with the tenets of social cognitive theory (Bandura, 1997). The unique program features include the cultural orientation of the program and the enlistment of

community support (Tucker & Herman, 2002). The partnership encompasses students, teachers, parents, schools, community leaders, business leaders, policymakers at all levels, and the African American church.

The Model Program synthesizes individual academic tutoring and homework assistance with social skills training (cognitive modeling and self-instruction) in an after-school program (Tucker & Herman, 2002). Operating since 1990 from a local church serving an African American community, the program is open to students in grades 1-12 who are referred by their parents or teachers for reading difficulties, mathematics performance problems, mild behavior problems, or social skills problems. Younger students (grades 1-6) and older students (grades 7 and higher) attend the 2-hour sessions on different days, with each group having one day per week. In addition to the academic and social skills components, the sessions close with an affirmation and sharing of positive feelings regarding the positive efforts and accomplishments of the students. Parent training and teacher training are also integral program components. All the tutors in the academic component (primarily undergraduate students with some parents and community leaders serving as tutors) are trained in the step-by-step teaching/learning method derived from Meichenbaum's cognitive modeling and self-instruction approach. The Model Program teachers and any other interested teachers participate in workshop training for SET strategies and techniques. The techniques include the step-by-step teaching/learning method, feedback formula, and self-praise.

The Model Program was evaluated after two years in a study involving low-income African American 3rd and 9th grade students enrolled in a Florida school district (Tucker & Herman, 2002). The students were randomly assigned to the Model Program or a planned control group. An additional group of students, labeled as the enrichment group, consisted of

students whose families were church members and who received individual tutoring and participated in other program activities. Students assigned to the Model Program but who did not participate in the activities served as a default control group.

Over two years, the default control group students experienced a significant decline in mathematics performance (Tucker & Herman, 2002). The enrichment group, the only group that received the full one-on-one tutoring intervention, enjoyed a significant increase in reading performance. After four years, evaluation data showed that the Model Program participants had significantly higher GPAs than control group students, and the increases in prosocial and adaptive behaviors and decreases in problem behaviors observed at the 2-year point were sustained. In addition, the Model Program participants had significantly fewer school absences than the control group students. The documented success of the initial program generated efforts to replicate the teacher training component across the country, along with partnership education programs (PEPs) similar to the Model Program. Tucker and Herman strongly advocate the development of multidimensional, culturally-sensitive programs for promoting the academic and social success of economically disadvantaged African American children and youth.

To further advance the success of African American students, Tucker, Herman, Pedersen, Vogel, and Reinke (2000) solicited the views of 22 elementary school and 21 high school students who were involved with the Model Program. The students were asked how African American students could be higher achievers at school and what their perspectives were on four aspects of school-related behavior: (a) what behaviors are problematic at school, (b) what causes school behavior problems, (c) how parents and teachers could promote students' success, and (d) how students could advance their own success.

The overwhelming majority of the students agreed that being disruptive, not paying attention, showing physical aggression, and displaying disrespect for the teacher negatively impact academic success (Tucker et al., 2000). In addition, the students were highly aware of important study and school involvement behaviors as well as the power of peer pressure to exert a positive or a negative influence on academic achievement. The students recognized the importance of developing social networks that support academic success and adopting self-management strategies, which are integral to the Model Program.

According to the students, the best way teachers could promote academic success is to assure that the students understood all the material by querying them and providing additional explanations if needed (Tucker et al., 2000). The younger students were more concerned with having teachers explain things than the high school students, who regarded praise and encouragement from their teachers as especially important to students' success. This difference is apparent in Walker's (2007) philosophy. Walker criticizes high school teachers for providing students with excessive explanations that interfere with the development of self-directed learning skills. Praise and encouragement convey high expectations for students' success. The Model Program participants also valued praise and encouragement from their parents and advocated discussions between parents and teachers (Tucker et al.). The students also cited parent involvement with homework as a mechanism for helping students succeed in school and were very enthusiastic about after-school programs and field trips.

Tucker et al. (2000) noted that across age and grade level, the students were aware of the importance of education as a vehicle for upward social mobility which reflected the attitudes of the high-achievers interviewed by Morales (2010). According to Ogbu's (2003) theory, African American students tend to be cynical of the prospect that educational attainment will result in

upward mobility and, in reaction, they develop a "culture of opposition." Ogbu's theory is highly controversial. African American parents typically have high aspirations for their children's education (Somers et al., 2008). Furthermore, most studies show that African American students who feel supported by their teachers and who have a positive learning environment hold favorable attitudes toward school.

Harris (2006) explored White and African American students using data from the Maryland Adolescence Development in Context Study (MADICS) which refuted virtually all the principles of Ogbu's theory of an oppositional culture. Noting that there is tremendous variation in academic performance among students, Harris suggests that some students may express negative attitudes toward school in an attempt to preserve their self-esteem in the face of years of academic failure. The implication is that oppositional attitudes and behaviors are the result, rather than the cause, of school failure. Thus, the responsibility lies with the schools that are not helping students acquire the knowledge and skills they require to succeed.

Irving and Hudley (2008) found support for one aspect of oppositional culture among African American male youth: cultural mistrust. Their study was conducted with 115 African American boys in 11th and 12th grade at an ethnically diverse urban high school. The researchers found that the more the youths distrusted the dominant White culture to reward African Americans, the more likely they were to express oppositional views. These views were linked with low educational expectations. At the same time, Irving and Hudley, like Harris (2006), emphasized that there is a substantial degree of individual variation among African American students.

Among some African American students, high academic achievement is considered admirable for girls but not for boys (Irving & Hudley, 2008). This counterproductive perspective

has led to the development of programs specifically targeting at-risk African American male youths. Martin et al. (2007) examined the effectiveness of a comprehensive after-school program created to promote academic and social competence in a group of African American male adolescents at high risk for dropping out of school. The 33 students ranged from 13-17 years old and all were at least two grade levels behind their peers. Beyond their academic difficulties all the boys had been suspended or expelled from school at least once, and more than two-thirds had been suspended from two or more schools. Initially funded mainly through a Century 21 after-school project grant, the intensive program provided the students with a range of activities that varied from day to day and included tutoring, group counseling, social skills development, and cultural and recreational activities.

The Kaufman Brief Intelligence Test, Second Edition (KBIT) and the Kaufman Test of Educational Achievement, Second Edition (KTEA) were used to evaluate the students' progress (Martin et al., 2007). At the end of the two-year intensive program, all 33 boys were performing academically at the proper grade level. In fact, some participants advanced more than two grade levels. School attendance improved dramatically, combined with a sharp reduction in discipline referrals. None of the students were suspended or expelled. According to Martin et al., the program contained certain specific elements that are essential to the success of an after-school intervention for high-risk students, namely the use of appropriate baseline assessments and diligent attention to individualized learning plans and tutoring. The researchers advocate further examination of the role of assessment and intervention in designing after-school programs for at-risk, low-income youth.

Dropout Prevention

While academic tutoring was a central facet of a dropout prevention program described by Somers and Piliawsky (2004), the program was enriched with activities designed to boost the students' academic self-efficacy, motivation, and self-esteem as well as to promote close relationships between the students and tutors as a mechanism for increasing their personal commitment to school. The pilot project involved 96 low-income, primarily African American 9th graders. Forty-six students participated in the program and 50 students from the same school served as a comparison group. Participation in the program was entirely voluntary. As in the Academic Coaching Program (Nesselrodt & Alger, 2005), the tutors were university students who majored primarily in education. Like the students they worked with, most of the tutors were African American (Somers & Piliawsky, 2004).

The tutoring sessions were held after school for 2 hours, 4 days a week (Somers & Piliawsky, 2004). Prior to starting the program, the tutors were given specialized training on a range of topics including adolescent psychosocial development, motivation theory, multicultural teaching strategies, and working with parents. Additionally, the tutors engaged in regular meetings to share and discuss best practices and formal retraining sessions with professional consultants. Although mentoring was not a specific program component, Somers and Piliawsky observed that positive mentoring relationships developed between the tutors and the students over the course of the one-on-one partnerships. The tutors and students exchanged journals as part of the tutorials which were tailored to each student's unique needs.

The tutoring sessions were augmented with monthly enrichment workshops in which the students completed personality and interest inventories to enhance their self-knowledge and self-concepts and to help them explore career possibilities. Somers and Piliawsky (2004) noted that,

in discussions about the program, both the students and the tutors found the workshops enjoyable and useful. For both the adolescents and the university students, the workshops served as a vehicle for exploring their personalities and career interests. The enrichment program also included interactive workshops with professional guest consultants presenting topics related to real world success and the advantages of staying in school. College preparation was a focus of one workshop in which attending parents were given a complimentary copy of the guest speaker's book on college admissions. The workshops combined motivational techniques with clear and accurate information relating educational attainment to adult financial success.

According to Somers and Piliawsky (2004), the evaluation demonstrated a strong link between program participation and the students' adoption of behaviors related to school success such as studying and high attendance. The researchers' credit the synthesis of the work of the tutors and consultants with creating a model that actively engaged and motivated the students. School records demonstrated that the program participants had much higher rates of high school graduation than their peers who did not participate in the program. Interestingly, the students did not get higher grades as a result of the program. Somers and Piliawsky suggest that this may reflect difficulty in adapting to the more rigorous high school curriculum. This gap between the students' motivation and performance might be addressed by effective transition programs for students in middle school (Lacefield et al., 2010). Nevertheless, the most significant part of the program was the positive influence of the tutors and the enrichment activities on the vital decision of the students to stay in school (Somers & Piliawsky, 2004).

Discussions with the students, tutors, and consultants, along with observations of the program, revealed that many students did not seem fully involved in the tutoring process but continued attending the sessions. Somers and Piliawsky (2004) suggest that the students might

have viewed the program as a venue for socializing or even as a refuge from the streets or from having to take care of siblings. However, whatever their motivations, the students learned from the program and became much more committed to school, "which they perceived as a stable, caring environment that gave them a sense of belonging" (p. 21). The theme of school as a caring, supportive environment that fosters a sense of belonging is prominent in the literature on African American youth (Booker, 2004, 2006, 2007; Fenzel & O'Brennan, 2007; Stewart, 2008).

Another prominent theme is providing adolescents of color with positive adult role models (Jackson & Mathews, 1999; Royse, 1998; Somers, Owens, Piliawsky, 2009; Tucker & Herman, 2002; Wyatt, 2009). A key attraction of workshops with professional consultants was that students enjoyed meeting African American role models they could admire and look up to and "who encouraged them to be hopeful about their own future and to be optimistic about life's possibilities (Somers & Piliawsky, 2004, p. 21). Somers and Piliawsky noted that the consultants provided the students with concrete and specific advice to help them graduate and prepare for college (e.g., reading books, studying with peers, seeking a role model to act as a mentor, and practicing standardized test-taking). The consultants also showed them graphics describing different jobs and salaries, and, above all, the educational requirements for getting a good job.

According to Somers and Piliawsky (2004), "Effective urban school dropout prevention programs should provide students with hope and optimism to counter the effects of generations of poverty and inadequate employment opportunities in inner-city America" (p. 21). Somers et al. (2009) built on the pilot study in an evaluation of a tutoring and mentoring dropout prevention program to provide additional insight on the students' motivations and role models. The sample consisted of 9th graders, including 75 program participants and 65 students who served as a

comparison group. The students were equally divided by gender and 99% were African American.

As in the earlier study reported by Somers and Piliawsky (2004), participation in the tutoring program did not result in higher GPAs, the study's measure of academic achievement (Somers et al., 2009). Somers et al. suggest that GPA might not be the best index of academic achievement because it involves a number of behavior, motivation, and classroom variables. Additionally, given that participation in the program is voluntary, the program participants might have been relatively satisfied with the GPA they had at the onset of the 9th grade and the program might have protected them against the decline in grades often observed in the transition to high school. In fact, descriptive data showed that although both the program participants and non-participants had a slight improvement in grades over the school year, there was a tremendous degree of individual variation in both groups.

The dropout prevention program described by Somers et al. (2009) focused on tutoring within a mentoring relationship but did not seem to have included the professional consultant workshops that are part of the pilot program (Somers & Piliawsky, 2004). Compared to the students in the earlier study who were provided with clear and specific information on career choices, Somers et al. found that with the exception of teaching, few of the students had aspirations toward careers in fields such as technology, health care, or business. Instead, many of the students aspired to careers in the media and entertainment, which was not realistic for most. Somers et al. acknowledged that the students need concrete information linking education to career choices and earnings potential. The need for specific information was reinforced by the fact that the students did desire to complete high school and go on to college but, according to the authors, they might not know how to accomplish their goals.

A particularly notable finding was that, despite the student apparent attraction to careers in fields like entertainment and sports, most students chose their parents as role models rather than celebrities (Somers et al., 2009). In the original dropout prevention program, parents attended the guest consultant workshops and were provided with materials to guide them in helping their children pursue higher education (Somers & Piliawsky, 2004). Somers et al. (2009) view parents as an underutilized resource and advocate that schools devise programs to educate and engage parents as role models for their children. Informal mentors, including family members, have been found to play a powerful role in the academic success of Latino youth (Sanchez, Esparza, & Colon, 2008). In their study of Latino high school seniors of all academic achievement levels, Sanchez et al. found that students who had informal mentors (primarily immediate and extended family members) had a greater sense of belonging to school. Students with mentors had lower absenteeism and higher expectations for academic success than those without mentors. Having multiple mentors was particularly beneficial, suggesting that the influences of supportive adults with different strengths complement each other to the student's advantage.

Providing the students with social support is central to the tutoring/mentorship dropout prevention program (Somers & Piliawsky, 2004; Somers et al., 2009). Somers et al. (2008) explored the effects of social support and individual characteristics on the academic success of 9th grade students from one high school. Five types of social support were examined: parent support, teacher support, classmate support, close friend support, and school support. Support from parents and peers were the most strongly linked with the students' grades, and support from parents, teachers, and peers were associated with educational intentions, educational behavior, and identification of the personal and financial value of education. Personal control was also

linked with positive academic outcomes. Overall, the findings demonstrated that, while the five types of social support varied in the degree of influence over the students' academic performance, all five made some contribution.

According to Somers et al. (2008), the strong positive impact of parent support on the students' grades reinforces the important role of African American parents in their children's education. The researchers note that African American parents generally have high educational aspirations for their children and desire to see them do well in school. However, low-income families are not always aware of their rights and their roles in the educational process. The researchers strongly advocate that school districts reach out to parents and suggest the need for legislative policies mandating that schools develop parent involvement protocols.

Graduation Coaching

Lacefield et al. (2010) reported on one of the six urban high schools serving as test sites for a GEAR UP project in which graduation coaches were assigned to the schools as part of an intervention for students at risk for dropping out of school. The longitudinal study began with three cohorts of 7th and 8th grade students attending four middle schools that adopted a novel case management program to improve the students' academic performance and help them successfully navigate the transition to high school. With data demonstrating the effectiveness of the middle school program, the case management model was adapted to fit the developmental needs of older adolescents. The schools were located in a district where close to two-thirds of the students qualified for free or reduced price meals and roughly half the student population consisted of racial or ethnic minorities including a growing number of English language learners. The graduation coaches acted as liaisons connecting the students with a variety of academic and social support services to help them deal with issues such as substance use, teen pregnancy, and

community violence. According to Lacefield et al. (2010), given that high schools students are confronted with more complex social issues than middle school students, it is especially important to provide them with adult mentors for support and guidance.

Based on a social constructivist model, the paramount role of the graduation coaches was to enhance the students' capabilities for successfully interacting with the school environment and actively shaping their own learning experience (Lacefield et al., 2010). The findings presented by Lacefield et al. are based on two 9th grade student cohorts: a cohort who completed 9th grade and the first semester of 10th grade and a cohort who completed the first 9th grade semester.

The students identified as at-risk were retroactively classified into three groups:

- *at-risk falling,* denoting students whose GPA trajectories showed an increasing decline in academic achievement in middle school, particularly in 8th grade;
- *at risk rising,* encompassing students whose GPA trajectories were either low or dropped during 6th grade but were trending upward to 2.0 (a "C") or above in 8th grade; and
- *at-risk failing,* referring to students whose GPAs ranked them as failing in nearly all courses in 6th, 7th, and 8th grades but who had been promoted and went on to high school (Lacefield et al., 2010).

Analyzing the entries in the graduation coaches' daily activity logs in conjunction with the student data, Lacefield et al. disclosed a somewhat paradoxical effect. That is, they found that about half of the total coaching time was devoted to students who were classified as *at-risk rising* (i.e., likely to be successful) while the other half of coaching activity was divided among the students in the three at-risk groups.

While questioning whether devoting coaching time to students who were unlikely to drop out was needlessly taxing scarce resources, Lacefield et al. (2010) stated that the coaches appeared to be carefully monitoring the "successful" students' performance and spending most of their time and resources with those in this group whose grades were on a downward spiral. Coaching did not, however, significantly improve the performance of students classified as at-risk falling or at-risk failing. Students with these two designations followed virtually identical trajectories regardless of the extent of coaching they experienced or whether they were coached at all. The group that derived the greatest benefit from coaching was composed of students who made a successful transition from middle to high school and needed only a minimal amount of coaching to do well in high school. Lacefield et al. described these students as highly coachable. The innovative coaching project is still being evaluated and Lacefield et al. noted that the preliminary findings are being used for strategic planning for more efficient use of coaching time. The researchers view graduation coaching as a very promising practice for urban high schools.

Summary

The academic achievement gap based on SES and ethnicity has been a focus of attention since the publication of the Coleman Report in 1966. Successful school reforms have attempted to address educational inequities and there are currently many innovative models, programs, and strategies that are empirically supported for improving the academic achievement of economically disadvantaged African American and Latino students. Researchers and practitioners are virtually unanimous in stating that teachers' expectations for academic achievement are pivotal to the success of low-income minority students. High expectations are built into effective school models such as small academies and learning communities that have

begun to emerge in urban communities (Darling-Hammond & Friedlaender, 2008). However, Walker's (2007) study reveals that even when confronted with evidence of students' dedication, effort, and excellence, some educators still adhere to negative cultural stereotypes that undermine the academic achievement of African American students.

Individual tutoring has a long history as a highly effective educational strategy (Hock et al., 2001; Roskosky, 2010). Walker (2007) demonstrated the benefits of peer tutoring for the tutor as well as the tutee. Mentoring also has a venerable history and is an excellent vehicle for promoting the academic and psychosocial development of at-risk youth (de Anda, 2001; Wyatt, 2009). Multidimensional counseling and after school programs have the advantage of addressing all facets of students' development and often include parent and community involvement (Somers & Piliawsky, 2004; Tucker & Herman, 2002). There are many empirically proven and promising strategies for improving the educational outcomes of at-risk students. Two key concerns are tailoring the program to the specific needs of the participants and providing the students with support and encouragement to boost their self-confidence, self-esteem, and sense of empowerment.

CHAPTER 3 METHODOLOGY

This mixed methods case study examines the 30/30 Program at Sample High School in XYZ County, Virginia. Although the school sits in a suburban community, the school has many attributes of an inner city school. Approximately 1,850 students attend Sample High School, whose students' demographics are 38% African-American, 30% Hispanic, 20% Caucasian, 6% Asian, and 6% other or multi-racial. Approximately 53% of the students who attend Sample High School qualify as students who are eligible for free and reduced priced meals.

The 30/30 Program was staffed by five adults who worked with 30 at-risk students from the beginning of their sophomore year until graduation (three years). This program was designed to help at-risk students increase their chances of graduating on time. The adult facilitators of the 30/30 Program planned academic and social activities, planned and attended fieldtrips, and met with the students on a regular basis to focus on academics, behavior, and attendance. This study analyzed student data to determine whether there was an increase in final academic performance, improved attendance, improved behavior, and the on-time graduation rate by the students who participated in the 30/30 Program. This study also provided an analysis of the perceptions of the adult facilitators and a sample of the student participants regarding the effectiveness of the 30/30 Program with a focus on identifying which aspects of the 30/30 Program positively affected the academic performance of the at-risk students.

To serve as a guide to accomplishing the objectives of the study, the following research: questions were formulated.

Research Question 1: How did the final academic grades of the participants in the 30/30 Program differ from those of the comparison group?

Research Question 1: How did the final academic grades of the participants in the 30/30 Program differ from those of the comparison group?

Research Question 2: How did the school attendance of the participants in the 30/30 Program differ from that of the comparison group?

Research Question 3: How did the number of reported disciplinary incidents of the participants in the 30/30 Program differ from those of the comparison group?

Research Question 4: How did the graduation rates of the participants in the 30/30 Program differ from those of the comparison group?

Research Question 5: What are the perceptions of the adult facilitators and student participants regarding the effectiveness of the 30/30 Program?

This chapter includes a discussion of the study design and participants as well as a description of the intervention (i.e., the 30/30 Program). The chapter also describes data collection and analysis and discusses ethical considerations.

Study Design

A mixed methods design was used that includes both quantitative data to determine the relationship among variables, and qualitative data to explore more complex educational interactions. This mixed methods case study utilized a longitudinal research design. Longitudinal studies describe the changes in a situation using data collected over a certain span of time, at different intervals (Gall, Gall, & Borg, 2007). The longitudinal data focused on the students' grades, attendance, behavior, and graduation records from their freshman year, prior to their participation in the 30/30 Program, and over the course of the students' participation in the program. These data were used to determine if the participation in the program resulted in an

improvement in academic performance, school attendance, behavior, and on-time graduation rate of students during the 30 months of the program.

This two-group, quasi experimental design involved a comparison between two similar groups of students who were not randomly assigned to intervention and comparison groups. The intervention group included 30 at-risk students who participated in the 30/30 Program while the comparison group included 20 at-risk students who did not participate in the 30/30 Program. The participants' data were compared prior to and after participation in the program. Since the quantitative aspect of this study made use of already-existing data only, none of the study variables were manipulated.

The quantitative variables include the students' academic achievement, attendance, behavior, and on-time graduation rate, as measured by their academic grades, attendance records, behavior records, and graduation records. These measures were gathered from records in the school's registrar and discipline offices for students who participated in the 30/30 Program and for a group of at-risk students who did not participate. The independent variable consisted of a dummy-coded variable denoting participation or nonparticipation in the 30/30 Program. The four remaining variables (academic performance, attendance, school behavior, and graduation rates) comprised the dependent variables. Numerical data quantifying academic performance were used to determine whether the 30/30 Program mentorship and activities had a positive effect on the academic performance of at-risk students. The results were used to test assertions, such as those made by Wyatt (2009), that mentorship is a method that can be used to improve academic performance and graduation rates for at-risk students.

To further substantiate the quantitative results of the study, a phenomenological inquiry method based in naturalistic inquiry (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) was used by including semi-

structured interviews. According to Hoepfl (1997), phenomenological, naturalistic inquiry endeavors to comprehend phenomena in settings that are context-specific. The use of qualitative data enables one to explore and understand information from fieldwork and produces findings that cannot be arrived by means of statistical procedures. Qualitative narrative methods are warranted since quantitative methods cannot measure human experiences and perceptions. Semi-structured, qualitative interviews are best suited to document and understand the experiences of students with regards to the 30/30 Program (Cozby, 2001).

The qualitative portion of the study was included to provide a deeper understanding of the reasons underlying the success or failure of the program. The qualitative analysis focused on the perceptions of the facilitators and participants regarding the effectiveness of the 30/30 Program and specific aspects of the program which positively affected the academic performance and behavior of the students. This phenomenological approach was used to explore the perceptions, opinions, and feelings of participants based on their lived experiences with a particular phenomenon.

The root of phenomenology is the understanding of a given phenomenon as relayed by the participants who experienced it (Cameron, Schaffer, & Hyeon-Ae, 2001). The phenomenological design involves investigating the experiences of individuals in order to obtain "comprehensive descriptions that provide the basis for a reflective structural analysis that portray the essences of the experience" (Moustakas, 1994, p. 13). Researchers use phenomenology to arrive at the essential meaning of a lived experience as it pertains to a particular research focus. Specifically, this study used Moustakas' modified van Kaam method of phenomenological induction. Moustakas argued, "Phenomena are the building block of human science and the basis for all knowledge" (p. 26).

In this study, the phenomena studied were perceptions of the facilitators and participants regarding the effectiveness of the 30/30 Program and the specific aspects of the program which positively affected the academic performance and behavior of at-risk students. Phenomenology is appropriate because of the open nature of the analysis which allowed conclusions to be drawn from the responses of participants across the sample. I conducted in-depth interviews with a subset of the 30/30 Program participants and four facilitators. The interview questions for the student participants are included in Appendix A and those for the facilitators are included in Appendix B. The interview questions were designed to elicit the participant's experiences and feelings.

Study Participants

Students

Study participants included 50 students from Sample High School who were all classified as academically at-risk students. The classification of a student as "at-risk" was based on the student's GPA. The pool of students who were eligible to participate in the program consisted of the bottom performing 50 students of their class, i.e., the students with the lowest GPAs at the end of freshman year. Although we considered attendance and discipline of the students, their GPA was the number one factor considered for eligibility in the program. We invited the 50 students to the meeting and most of them attended. Of those who attended and based on their willingness, grades, attendance and discipline, we selected 30 to participate in the 30/30 Program. The 20 students who were not selected to participate in the program were used as a basis for comparison for the 30 students who participated in the 30/30 Program. All participants were in their sophomore year at the beginning of the study. No compensation or support above the support provided to all students was given to the 20 participants in the comparison group.

The academic performance, attendance, and discipline records of all 50 students were tracked from the time the 30/30 Program students began participation in the program during their sophomore year (SY2007-2008) until they graduated from high school (SY2009-10). Data from the freshman year was collected and used as baseline data. The study also used school data to determine the graduation rate for the 50 at-risk students. In addition, 10 selected students were interviewed to provide qualitative data for the study.

Facilitators

Each student in the intervention group was randomly assigned to one of five facilitators. The facilitators included a career specialist, a parent liaison, a business community member, a teacher leader, and me, who was the high school principal during the years the study was conducted. I interviewed the other four facilitators as part of the qualitative analysis of the study.

The 30/30 Program

The 30/30 Program participants took part in a wide variety of activities planned by the adult facilitators. The activities were both academic and social and were designed to promote personal relations, encourage academic motivation, and provide new experiences. Activities included field trips, dinner outings, college visits, seminars, etiquette class, etc. The adult facilitators took the students to see the movie *Freedom Writers*, which was about at-risk students in a Los Angles school. The purpose of the trip was to motivate the students to work hard. During the movie, the students also learned about the Holocaust which prompted a trip to the Holocaust Museum in Washington D.C. Students were also treated to a professional football game and introduced to Santana Moss of the Washington Redskins. After this trip, Santana Moss hosted a free football camp affording each 30/30 participant the opportunity to participate.

The students were placed into four mentor groups consisting of seven or eight students in each group. Each group had an adult leader who reviewed grades, attendance, and behavior once a month. During monthly meetings, students were provided lessons on how to improve in each of the areas; plus facilitators provided academic tutoring, and reviewed the students' weekly behavior referral reports. When students were void of any disciplinary referrals, they received praise from the facilitator; however, when students received discipline referrals, counseling and strategies (decided by each facilitator) were given to help avoid future discipline referrals. Each time students improved in the goal areas, they were recognized with incentives that included, but were not limited to certificates, gift cards, and movie tickets and were treated to McDonalds for lunch.

Quantitative Data

For this study, the annual GPA data from freshman year (the baseline year) to the end of senior year were collected and used as the measure of academic performance. Attendance was defined as the percentage of the total school days (180) attended by the participants. As with the academic performance data, annual school attendance data was collected from freshman year (the baseline year) through senior year. The graduation rate was determined based on whether the participants obtained the necessary credits for graduation which, for this school, included 22 standard credits and six standards of learning (SOL) state-required credits. Behavior was defined as the number of times a student was reprimanded for inappropriate behavior as documented in their discipline records. Behavior data from the participants' freshman year was also used as the baseline.

Once Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval was secured (see Appendix C), I initiated contact with the appropriate central office school officials of the XYZ school district

and the relevant site administrators at Sample High School. I scheduled a meeting with the school officials to explain the purpose of the study, the nature of the data needed, and the manner in which the data would be used. The school officials were encouraged to ask questions to clarify any issues. They were also informed that the school would be provided with a copy of the results of the study for their information for use at their discretion. Upon the approval of Sample High School administrators and the county school district officials, I hired a school system employee to retrieve the needed data consisting of academic performance, attendance, and discipline records for the quantitative analyses.

Qualitative Data

For the qualitative analysis, I conducted interviews with 10 students who participated in the 30/30 Program and the four other adult facilitators. Two students from each adult facilitator were randomly selected and interviewed. The interviews were conducted using a list of open-ended questions that were pre-written to ensure that each participant responded to the same questions asked in the same manner (Johnson & Turner, 2003). This provided a structure and focus for gathering the perceptions of the interviewees regarding the effectiveness of the 30/30 Program and the specific aspects of the program that positively affected the academic performance, school attendance, and behavior of the at-risk students (Patton, 2002). I followed an exact format and the responses of the student and adult interviewees were recorded and then transcribed by me. See Appendices A and B for the lists of interview questions.

Data Analysis

Quantitative Analysis

The quantitative data were analyzed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) v17.0. The first three research questions were addressed using Mann-Whitney's U tests,

to test for the presence of statistically significant differences between the intervention and comparison groups in academic performance, attendance, and disciplinary records. The analysis included data from the students' sophomore, junior, and senior high school years. Academic performance was quantified using the mean GPA of the student from their second (sophomore) year during school year 2007-2008 until their fourth (senior) year during school year 2009-2010. Attendance was quantified using the percentage of the total school days (180) the students were in attendance at school during the four high school years beginning with school year 2006-2007, the baseline year before intervention began. Behavior was quantified using the number of disciplinary instances reported for each student. For all variables, the scores for the freshman year were used as the baseline. For the fourth research question regarding school graduation, a frequency analysis was conducted to determine the percentage of participants in each group who were able to graduate on time after four years.

Qualitative Analysis

The qualitative data gathered from the interviews was processed using a thematic analysis procedure. This method is used to identify themes and patterns within the narrative data and is compatible for use in studies using a mixed methods approach (Percy & Kostere, 2008). I read the transcriptions of the interviews and highlighted words, sentences, or phrases that appeared to be meaningfully related to the research questions. Using a number system, these highlighted sections were coded to represent specific groups of ideas or themes. This process was repeated for each interview transcript. Once all transcripts were analyzed and coded, patterns and themes were identified from the coded data. After the identification of the major themes of the responses, direct quotations from the transcripts were used as supporting evidence for the themes that emerged from the coded data as recommended by Perry and Kostere (2008).

Moustakas's (1994) modification of the van Kaam (1959) method of analysis was used in this study. Using Moustakas's seven steps of phenomenological induction, I coded and then reduced responses of the participants to the open-ended interview questions to arrive at the essence of the participants' experiences and opinions with regard to the central research focus. The following steps listed by Moustakas were used for analyzing each participant's interview data:

- Listing and preliminary grouping of every relevant experience.
- Reduction and elimination of extraneous data to capture essential constituents of the phenomenon.
- Clustering and thermalizing the invariant constituents to identify core themes of the experience.
- Final identification and verification against the complete record of the research participant to ensure explicit relevancy and compatibility.
- Construct for each co-researcher [interviewee] an individualized textural description of the experience based upon the verbatim transcripts using relevant and valid invariant constituents and themes.
- Construct for each co-researcher [interviewee] and an individual structural description of the experience based upon individual textural description and imaginative variation.
- Construct for each participant a textural-structural description of the meaning and essence of the experiences. (1994, pp. 120-122)

These steps were used for the qualitative component of the study in order to ensure that: (a) the participants were able to express their lived experiences, (b) these data were understood and

interpreted accordingly, and (c) a composite description of the meaning and essence of experiences representing the population could be developed so that generalizations could be drawn (Moustakas, 1994).

Internal Validity

According to Leedy and Ormrod (2005), findings can suffer from problems of internal validity if they are affected by factors other than those thought to have caused them or if the interpretation of the data by the researcher is not clearly supportable. Factors that may affect this study include subject variability, size of subject population, and instrument sensitivity. I was sensitive to these factors and attempted to eliminate factors that might have reduced the internal validity of the proposed study. The research was conducted in a timely fashion in order to obviate any threats to data becoming irrelevant as recommended by Neuman (2004). In order to reduce the potential for undue influence by any one research participant, private one-on-one interviews were conducted. The nature of data collection was designed to establish trust between me and each research participant, thus enhancing the dependability of the data. Codes rather than identifying information will be published to eliminate the possibility of linking individuals to the interviews. These procedures were designed to provide the means to maintain internal validity and establish credibility based upon integrity as recommended by Hopkins & King (2010).

External Validity

According to Leedy and Ormrod (2005), the external validity of findings can suffer if results cannot be extended or applied to contexts outside those in which the research occurred. Factors that may influence external validity include sample characteristics, subject selection, research environment, and data collection methods. In this study, participants were drawn from

one school. It should be noted that prior studies have used a very similar approach. Most education researchers sample from one or more schools to which they have access (e.g., Bauman & Del Rio, 2006; Dake et al., 2003; Unnever & Cornell, 2004) very few studies have sought to obtain a representative sample of all schools in the United States. The use of students in a naturalistic setting can assist in promoting external validity (Creswell, 2009). The naturalistic conditions of this study can frame the essential elements of tacit knowledge and mitigate challenges to external validity. Collection of data from participants within the classroom setting facilitates external validity because the student participants are already familiar with the classroom environment (Priest & Woods, 2002).

Reliability

Reliability in qualitative research refers to how reasonable the data obtained is for a given study (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2005). There are two aspects of reliability of a qualitative study: internal consistency and external consistency (Neuman, 2003). The internal consistency refers to how reasonable the data collected is and if there is consistency in the observations that are obtained from each of the participants in the study (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2005). For this study, participants were asked several questions about a given theme to allow me to verify the consistency of the participants' answers. Triangulation of the data included the use and analysis of multiple data sources along with theories as collaborative evidence for the validity of the findings as recommended by Gall et al. (2003). The external consistency of the data was then verified by comparing the information found for the current study with information collected from other studies (Hesse-Biber & Leavy; Neuman, 2005). Once all responses from the participants were gathered, the external consistency needed to be tested by comparing findings with existing research related to working with at-risk youth.

Ethical Considerations

The ethical standards of educational research exist to protect the integrity of both the researcher and study participants, and strict implementation of these standards is required throughout the research process (Fossey, Harvey, McDermott, & Davidson, 2002). It should be noted that I was the principal of Sample High School and one of the five adult facilitators of the 30/30 Program. While this violates no ethical considerations, the possible biases brought about by my close participation with the program itself may affect the results of the study. Given the situation, I took precautions to avoid interjecting personal biases toward the program or individual study participants.

I took special care to protect the privacy of all study participants. The school officials were contacted to secure approval for the collection and use of the data. Because school records are confidential and because I was unable to obtain signed parent permissions to use the academic data of the 50 participants, measures were implemented to protect the privacy of the study participants. No names were used; instead, each participant was assigned an identification number. The list of names and identification numbers was maintained in a secure file separate from the rest of the data and accessible only by me. Any references to the individual participants were made using identification numbers only to ensure the confidentiality of their data. The research files, both electronic and paper, will be stored for three years after publication. After this period of time, all electronic and paper records will be deleted and destroyed.

Summary

This chapter included the restatement of the research questions that guided the collection and analysis of the data. The chapter also contains a description of study participants, data collection, and analysis. The results of the data analysis are discussed in detail in Chapter 4.

CHAPTER 4 RESULTS

The purpose of this mixed methods case study was to evaluate the effectiveness of the 30/30 Program for at-risk high school students who were not succeeding academically. Students such as those who participated in the program often leave high school without the proper reading and math skills to compete in the diverse global workforce of the 21st century.

This chapter describes the results of the analysis of the data gathered in this study. These results are intended to address the following research questions:

Research Question 1: How did the final academic grades of the participants in the 30/30 Program differ from those of the comparison group?

Research Question 2: How did the school attendance of the participants in the 30/30 Program differ from that of the comparison group?

Research Question 3: How did the number of reported disciplinary incidents of the participants in the 30/30 Program differ from those of the comparison group?

Research Question 4: How did the graduation rates of the participants in the 30/30 Program differ from those of the comparison group?

Research Question 5: What are the perceptions of the adult facilitators and student participants regarding the effectiveness of the 30/30 Program?

This chapter includes a description of study participants and presents the results of the analysis of the data designed to address the research questions. The analyses included descriptive and inferential statistics and the thematic analysis of responses to interview questions posed for four of the adult facilitators and 10 student participants. The chapter concludes with a summary of the salient findings presented in this chapter.

Description of the Student Sample

All student participants were recruited during their sophomore year at Sample High School. Table 1 indicates that both groups were comprised of slightly more males than females. It also indicates that the intervention group had a baseline average GPA and attendance somewhat lower than the comparison group. A larger difference at baseline was the discrepancy between disciplinary incidents for the two groups with the intervention group having many more reported incidents than the comparison group.

Table 1

Baseline Descriptive Statistics Freshman Year (SY 2006-07)

	Intervention N=30	Comparison N=17
Male	18	11
Female	12	6
Average GPA	1.26	1.49
Average Attendance*	85.85%	91.23%
Total No. of Disciplinary Incidents	38	6

nb. *Percent of Total Days (180) in school;

Quantitative Analysis for Research Questions 1-4

The first four questions regarding student outcomes were addressed using statistical analysis of quantitative data collected on the two groups of students. Among the initial 50 students, 30 students were participants in the 30/30 Program and comprised the intervention group. The remaining 20 students were used as the comparison group. To address the first four research questions, school data were collected on the academic performance, attendance, school behavior, and graduation rates. It should be noted that data received from the school district was not complete. Baseline data from three of the comparison group members was missing. Academic performance for each group was quantified based on the annual mean GPA of each

group from freshman to senior year. Attendance for each group was quantified using the percentage of total school days (180) each student was present for each of the four school years covered in the study, while behavior for each group was quantified using the number of reported disciplinary instances. For all variables, the scores for the freshman year were used as the baseline.

A Mann-Whitney's U test was conducted for student achievement and attendance to test whether there was a significant difference between the groups for either variable. A Mann-Whitney's U test was used instead of a t-test because one of the assumptions of a t-test, that the sample has a normal distribution, is not true in this situation. The Mann-Whitney's test rank orders the scores and then calculates the median value for each group (rather than a mean value as in the t-test). Results of the Mann-Whitney analyses for student achievement and attendance are discussed next.

Research Question 1: Academic Performance

The baseline average GPA for the intervention group (1.26) was slightly lower than the comparison group's mean baseline GPA (1.49). In the succeeding school years, the average GPA for the intervention group remained higher than the GPA for the comparison group. Table 2 includes the means and standard deviations for GPAs, the measure used for academic performance.

Table 2

Descriptive Statistics for Academic Performance: Average GPA by Group

School Year	Intervention Mean	Intervention SD	Comparison Mean	Comparison SD
Ninth grade (baseline)	*1.26*	*0.40*	*1.49*	*0.40*
Tenth grade	1.39	0.83	1.18	0.72
Eleventh grade	1.80	0.49	1.30	0.55
Twelfth grade	1.67	0.72	1.63	0.44
Average cumulative GPA tenth to twelfth grades*	1.53	0.61	1.40	0.53

*Cumulative rate calculated for the three years during 30/30 Program implementation

The data for mean GPAs are presented graphically in Figure 1 using line graphs. The graph shows that the GPAs for the intervention group remain slightly higher throughout the four years.

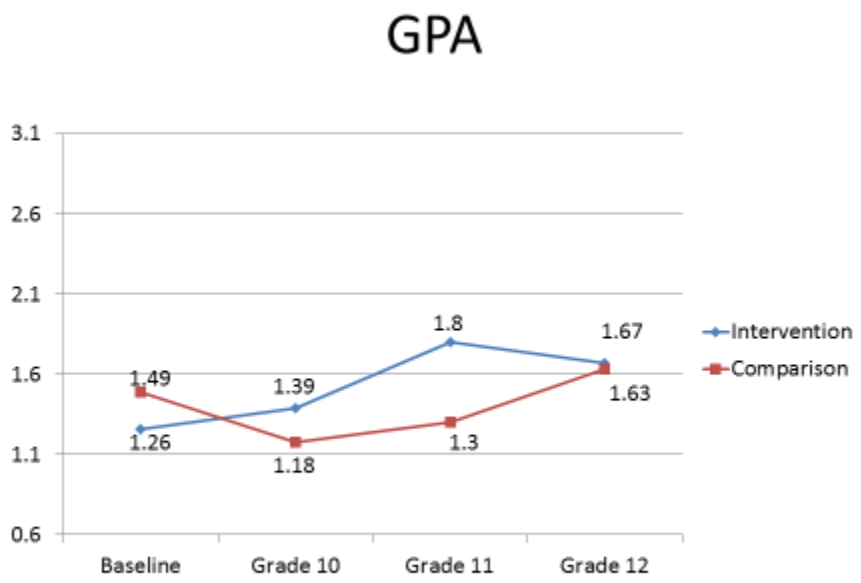

Figure 1. Annual Mean GPAs for Intervention and Comparison Groups

Table 3 displays the results of the Mann-Whitney's U test for student achievement as measured by participants' annual mean GPA. The results regarding GPAs indicate that there was only one significant difference (at the $p<.05$ level) between the groups and that was for the eleventh grade when the mean GPA for the intervention group was 1.8 and 1.3 for the comparison group. Although the intervention group had a slightly higher mean GPA (1.49) at the end of ninth grade, the baseline year, compared to the comparison group's mean GPA (1.26), the difference was not significant. There were also no significant differences between the groups' GPAs in the tenth and twelfth grades.

Table 3

Results of Mann-Whitney's U Test for Academic Performance

	Group Medians Rankings				
School Year	Intervention	Comparison	U	Z	P
Ninth grade (baseline)	21.83	30.00	190	-1.952	0.051
Tenth grade	26.77	22.21	232	-1091	0.275
Eleventh grade	25.14	15.37	102	-2.643	0.008*
Twelfth grade	21.10	19.84	187	-0.339	0.735

*Significant at $p<.05$. There also was not a significant difference between the GPA gains of the two groups (results not reported).

Research Question 2: School Attendance

The data for attendance was defined as the percentage of the total annual school days (180) a student was in attendance during the school years covered in the study. The annual mean of these percentages was calculated for the two groups. As shown in Table 4, the attendance rate of the intervention group was slightly lower than the attendance rate of the comparison group for the ninth grade, which was the baseline year prior to the beginning of the 30/30 Program. Also noted in the remaining years (tenth through twelfth grades), the comparison group had a mean attendance rate that was somewhat higher than the intervention group's rate. It should be noted

that the standard deviations (SDs) of the intervention groups were much larger in the intervention years than the SDs of the comparison group. This suggests several outliers with very low scores may have influenced the annual means for these years. Although adult and student participants stated that student school attendance improved during the duration of the program, there were outliers that explains why the data did not show significant improvement in the attendance data:

1) At the end of the 2006-2007 school year, thirty students were selected and agreed to participate in the 30/30 program.
2) During the 2007-2008 school year, all thirty students participated in all program activities.
3) During the 2008-2009 school year, seven of the thirty participants left the 30/30 program. Of the six, four withdrew from the school district, two dropped out of school, and one transferred to an alternative program in the district and chose to no longer participate in the 30/30 program.
4) During the 2009-2010 school year, one participant was removed from the school for disciplinary reasons and was enrolled in another district school. This participant remained a part of the 30/30 program. His adult facilitator communicated with him through phone calls and email. Because he was not permitted to be on school grounds, he only participated in off campus activities.
5) Also during the 2009-2010 school year, two participants became pregnant causing a significant reduction in their daily attendance in school.
6) One of the control group participants went from a 37% attendance rate in the 9th grade to a 98% attendance rate in the 12th grade year.

Table 4

Descriptive Statistics for School Attendance: Average Attendance Rate by Group

School Year	Intervention Mean	Intervention SD	Comparison Mean	Comparison SD
Ninth grade (baseline)	*85.85*	*20.14*	*91.23*	*14.75*
Tenth grade	87.79	16.13	92.91	4.87
Eleventh grade	86.61	18.04	90.90	6.32
Twelfth grade	74.87	26.46	87.70	6.23
Average cumulative rate tenth to twelfth grades*	83.09	20.21	90.50	5.81

*Cumulative rate calculated for the three years during 30/30 Program implementation

The data for mean attendance rate are presented graphically in Figure 2. The graph shows that, compared to the comparison group, the attendance rate of the 30/30 Program participants was lower at baseline and continued to be lower than the comparison group's rate for the three intervention years.

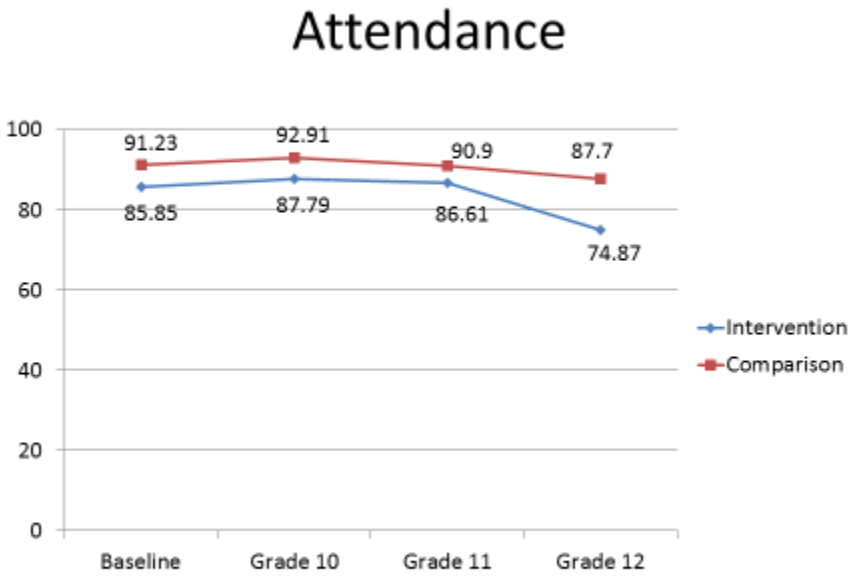

Figure 2. Average School Attendance Rate for Intervention and Comparison

A Mann-Whitney's U test was conducted for student attendance to test whether there was a significant difference between the groups. Once again, the Mann-Whitney's U test was used instead of a t-test because the school attendance rate is not normally distributed, an assumption required by the t-test. Table 5 displays the results of the Mann-Whitney's U test for attendance including the median value for each group (rather than the means as in the t-test). The results indicate that, in the baseline year prior to beginning the 30/30 Program intervention, there was no significant difference between the groups. Thus, the two groups had similar attendance records during their ninth grade. There were also no significant differences between the groups in their attendance in any of their remaining school years (i.e., their tenth, eleventh, and twelfth grades).

Table *5*

Results of Mann-Whitney's U Test for Attendance

	Group Medians (%)				
School Year	Intervention	Comparison	U	Z	P
2006-2007 (baseline)	21.97	27.59	194	-1.352	.176
2007-2008	23.23	27.79	232	-1.088	.277
2008-2009	21.74	22.30	224	-0.146	.884
2009-2010	19.02	24.23	165.5	-1.374	.169

Research Question 3: Discipline

The behavior incidents of the participants from the two groups were also compared. Behavior was defined as the total number of disciplinary incidents recorded by the school for each group per school year. During the baseline school year, the students' freshman year, the students in the intervention group had a much larger number of total reported disciplinary incidents (38) than the students in the comparison group who had only six incidents. In the baseline year (before intervention began) 12 intervention students had disciplinary records compared to only three students in the comparison group. The number of incidents for the intervention group decreased dramatically after the first intervention year (sophomore year) and

remained low the last two school years, with just four disciplinary incidents recorded for this group during their senior year. In contrast, behavior incidents for the comparison group began low (6) at baseline, their first year of high school but was followed by dramatic increases in their sophomore and junior year (19 and 22 incidents, respectively) as shown in Table 6.

Table 6

Number of Disciplinary Incidents by Group

School Year	Intervention	Comparison
2006-2007 (baseline)	38	6
2007-2008	16	19
2008-2009	18	22
2009-2010	4	4

The data in disciplinary incidents are shown graphically in Figure 3. The graph shows the convergence in number of disciplinary incidents of the groups after the first intervention year (tenth grade).

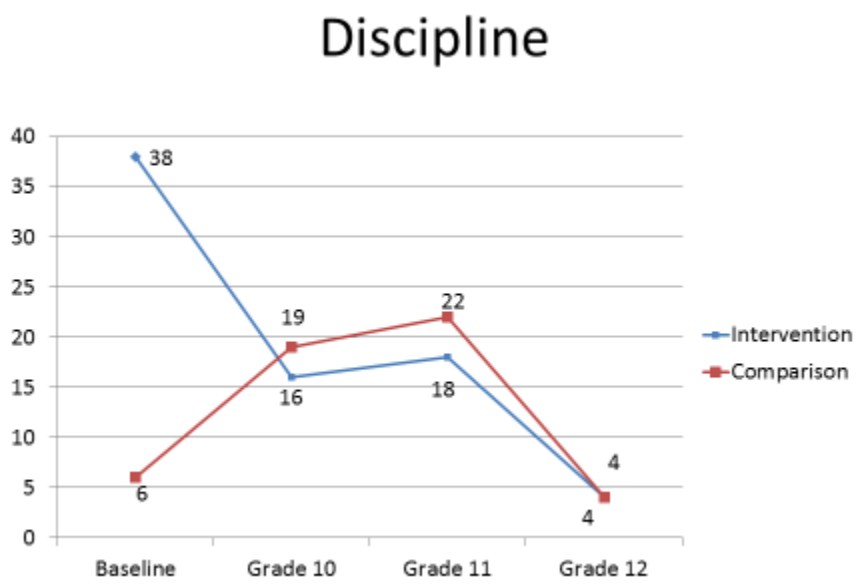

Figure 3. Number of Disciplinary Incidents for Intervention and Comparison Groups

Research Question 4: Graduation Rate

In addition to comparing the academic performance, attendance rate, and behavior of the students in the intervention and comparison groups, data were also collected to compare the graduation rates between the two groups. As seen in Table 7, four students from the intervention group did not graduate compared to two from the comparison group. A chi-square analysis was performed to determine whether there was a significant difference between the groups. Missing data for one student in the comparison group resulted in analysis for 19 (rather than 20) students in the comparison group. This student withdrew from the school and left the school district. The results of the chi-square analysis indicate that there was no significant relationship between participation in the 30/30 Program and the graduation rate of students [χ^2 (2) = 0.358, p = .550].

Table 7

Descriptive Statistics for Graduation Rate

	Number Graduated		Total Number
	Yes	No	
Intervention	26 (87%)	4 (13%)	30 (100%)
Comparison	17 (90%)	2 (11%)	19 (100%)
Total	42 (86%)	7 (14%)	49 (100%)

Qualitative Analysis for Research Question 5

Interviews of adult facilitators and students were used to address Question 5: ***What are the perceptions of the 30/30 Program?*** I interviewed ten of the intervention participants and four of their facilitators. This section describes the interviewees and the results of the analysis of the interview transcripts.

Description of Interviewees

Student Interviewees. The first group of interviewees in the qualitative phase included 10 former students who participated in the 30/30 Program of the school. Two of the students

were purposely selected from the mentees of each of the adult facilitators of the program. A total of eight female and two male former students participating in the semi-structured interviews achieved thematic saturation which is defined as the ongoing collection and analysis of data until no new information is obtained and there is a 'redundancy' in the theme categories and relationships in subsequent interviews (Creswell, 2009). Table 8 displays the demographic profile of the student participants at the time of the interviews.

Table 8

Demographic Profile of Student Interviewees

Participant Code	Age	Gender
#01	21	Female
#02	22	Female
#03	21	Male
#04	22	Female
#05	22	Male
#06	22	Male
#07	21	Female
#08	22	Female
#09	22	Female
#010	22	Female

Adult Facilitators. The second group of interviewees in this study included four adult facilitators of the 30/30 Program. Their profile and their participation in the program are briefly described in this section.

Facilitator #1. Facilitator #1 was a career center specialist, whose job at the school was to assist students who wanted to attend college. Being a person with interest in the success of students, she joined the program together with the other 30/30 Program team members. Facilitator #1 described her job and interest in the 30/30 Program:

> Mostly because I am very interested in the success of students in my capacity as a career service specialist, I do a lot of college counseling as well as career counseling in that area, as well as helping students to put the pieces together that they need in order to be successful, to even consider approaching college, and I am also personally very interested in addressing the needs of underserved minorities.

Facilitator #1 claimed that she was motivated to participate in the program because of the dedication of the school principal and her commitment to students' academic performance. She said:

> And so I was really attracted, just very authentically, by the purpose of the program, as well as, you know, my principal asked me, so of course I want to do as much as I can to be a team player at my school.

Facilitator #2. Facilitator #2 was a parent liaison who worked "at the time with a group of students who were at high risk academically." Facilitator #2 had the commitment to:

> …take some initiatives to intervene and provide some additional intervention and mentoring as part of the academic program in order to strengthen and raise their [the students'] self-esteem, language skills, interpersonal skills along with all the academic help and tutoring that they were receiving at school.

Facilitator #3. Facilitator #3 was a business community member who had been working with co-teachers in the design of a curriculum appropriate for at-risk students. Facilitator #3 claimed that he co-founded the 30/30 Program after recognizing the need to address students who were academically at risk. Facilitator #3 shared that his intention was to design a program that would provide the students "the path and a direction, an opportunity to have a better outcome than statistically they would have had."

Facilitator #4. Facilitator #4 was a teacher leader in the school who was interested in taking part in the program that the school principal brought in. When asked about the origin of

the program, Facilitator #4 said, “I don’t really know the origin of the idea, but we spoke about the idea of developing a program to help our lowest achieving students.” Facilitator #4 related that the idea of the program emerged from the school leader's desire to develop a program that would help at-risk students. Facilitator #4 shared that the planning and identification of students for the program required research.

Qualitative Findings

This section presents the data collected from the transcripts of the 10 students and four facilitators who participated in the study. Thematic analysis, with the aid of NVivo (QSR International) Qualitative Software, was used as the method of analysis. The analysis generated the following five thematic labels critical to the central question of perceptions of the program’s effectiveness:

- essential attributes of the 30/30 Program,
- facilitators' perceived positive results of the 30/30 Program,
- facilitators' recommendations for improving the program,
- students' perceived intention of the program, and
- students' perceived strengths of the program.

The first three thematic labels emerged from the transcripts of the program facilitators; the last two thematic labels emerged from the transcripts of the 10 students. The themes associated with the thematic labels were used as a framework for describing study participants' perceptions concerning the effectiveness of the 30/30 Program.

Thematic Label 1

Facilitators' Perceived Essential Attributes of the 30/30 Program. The first thematic label, essential attributes of the 30/30 program, was determined from six themes that emerged

from the transcripts of the facilitators who were asked to describe the 30/30 Program. Table 9 displays the five themes, along with the number of facilitators referencing the themes.

Table 9

Thematic Label 1: Facilitators' Essential Attributes of the 30/30 Program

Themes	Number (%) Participants Expressing this Theme
Commitment of the facilitators in students' advancement	4 (100)
The school leader's initiative to implement a program	4 (100)
Relationship building of facilitators with students	4 (100)
Incentive mechanism	4 (100)
Promotion of social interaction	4 (100)

The first theme regarding the program's attributes, *commitment of the facilitators in students' advancement*, articulates the concept that among the positive attributes of the 30/30 Program was the willingness of the adult facilitator to help at-risk students in their scholastic activities. Four of the facilitators claimed that success of the program could not be achieved when facilitators refused to offer their time, effort, and attention to students who required their professional assistance. Facilitator #3 stated, "I think that the most commendable [aspect of the program] was the time, the effort, and the personal attention that the facilitators/team members gave."

Facilitator #1 indicated that her commitment to students' advancement could be traced back to her intention to continuously respond to the social challenges that affected the education of students. She related the need of immigrants as well as those families who had less value for the education of their children. With the 30/30 Program, Facilitator #1 committed herself to offer an enabling environment that supported a positive learning experience. Facilitator #1 said:

> As long as there's that societal divide between the haves and the have-nots, and we're in a very diverse community, and there's a constant influx of new Americans, there's a constant influx of students whose families don't have experience with higher education, or students whose families had a bad experience with regular education, and that translates into how their kids—if the parents had a bad experience with teachers, sometimes the kids have a bad experience with teachers because the parents still kind of remember their experiences. So I think it was an opportunity to kind of correct some things that had not gone right in the past.

Facilitator #2 said, "The dedication of everybody who was involved in working with the program, the volunteer hours from our community members, the volunteer money that was provided to help us support the program, I think was outstanding and commendable."

Facilitator #4 said, "What I loved most about working with the 30/30 program was the dedication of the Principal and the other adult members. Everyone volunteered many hours and dedicated their time to ensure success of the students."

The second theme, the *school leader's initiative to implement a program*, suggests that the essential element in the success of the program was the program leadership. Four of the participants claimed that, while teachers could implement classroom programs that assisted the scholastic advancement of at-risk students, a school-wide program with a wide range of stakeholder participants would encourage students' participation. The facilitator participants claimed that the activities were realized because of the initiative and leadership of their school principal. Facilitator #1 shared her first moment with the program:

> While serving as the role of the career center specialist, I was approached by my principal, as a person who was concerned about the success of students, and asked if I was interested in being a part of a new program called the 30/30 Program wherein we would identify a certain group of students and provide incentives, and I immediately said yes, not really realizing what I was agreeing to.

Facilitator #4 also shared similar event:

> I learned about the 30/30 program from [the principal]. She brought the idea back to school. I don't really know the origin of the idea, but we spoke about the idea of developing a program to help our lowest achieving students. So, we spoke about the way we would help the students before actually beginning the program, and we started researching which students would be included and invited to this opportunity.

> Facilitator #3 shared an event: He met with the school Principal after hearing her speak about the school and its needs. At first the idea was a thought being born. It was an understanding that there was a need at the school. The need was to provide the most at-risk children a path and direction and an opportunity to have a better outcome.

> Facilitator #2 shared that she believed, because the large number of Hispanic students in the school, that having someone on the team that was fluent in Spanish was why she was approached by the Principal. She believed that the Principal was a visionary leader.

The third theme, *relationship building of facilitators with students*, suggests that the attention the students received from the facilitators motivated them to attend the classes and comply with the academic requirements set forth by their teachers. Facilitator #1 explained that the relationship established by the facilitators provided happiness to students. Facilitator #1 said: "They were just happy to have the—they were more drawn by the relationships and the extra attention that they were getting."

Facilitator #4 believed that the relationship the facilitators established with the students influenced the students' behaviors concerning attendance in classes. Facilitator #4 said:

> I think the relationship building that we did with these students absolutely showed, as I mentioned before, immediately in their desire to come to school... the fact that we connected with these students, I would say out of the 30, more than half of them had serious attendance problems and those attendance problems stopped because they had

> somebody to check in with them every day, that somebody cared about them. So that's probably the thing that I'm most proud of is the relationship building piece with kids.

It is interesting that this facilitator believed that, in general, attendance among 30/30 Program participants improved, although the data do not substantiate this. Facilitator #3 stated that as time went on, there was a relationship that grew with the students. "We developed a lot of trust and a very communicative bond with a relationship that allowed them (30/30 students) to feel comfortable in talking and opening up. I think there was definitely a bridge built." Facilitator #2 said, "Initially it was challenging to get to know some of the students. The more we met with them, the more I found them to loosen up and share more with us"

The fourth theme, *incentive mechanism*, articulates the importance of motivation in encouraging the participation of at-risk students. Facilitator #1 commented that while an incentive mechanism is an essential component of the 30/30 Program, the experiences the students had with the activities were received as incentives by the students. Facilitator #1 said:

> I liked the incentive programs. Sometimes you think, "Oh, kids aren't going to—they're not going to care about that. They're not going to care about going on a field trip. They're not going to care about a t-shirt. But students are really motivated and they were often motivated by, I think, more the experiences that were offered to them, not necessarily the things.

Facilitator #3 said:

> As a community member, I was able to provide experience for this group of students that many of them had never experienced. We took 26 of the 30 students to a Redskins game because they met the goal laid out for them that month. I believe that the large number of members met the goal because they really wanted to go the game.

Facilitator #3 explained, "I think that moving forward the incentive program, that's another area that could be improved… if a greater incentive would be provided it would be a good way to go."

Facilitator #2 said:

> Many people think that providing incentives to high school students does not work, I think they are wrong. The students in 30/30 looked forward to every incentive and it is my opinion that the large majority of the students worked harder because of them

The fifth theme, *promotion of social interaction*, suggests that facilitators put emphasis on the advantage of students' interaction with their environment. Facilitator #2 shared:

> I think for many of them, that was the only social interaction they had outside of school and just being home watching television. I think many of them voiced and shared that their exposure to activities such as sports, even community service within their community, having gone into Washington D.C. was foreign to them despite living so close to the city for so long, so many years.

Facilitator #4 said:

> Because of the time we spent in and out of school, we became a family. During our monthly meetings a great emphasis was placed on communication skills and self-advocacy.

Facilitator #3 said:

> It was apparent to me when we first met that many of the members of 30/30 were student who were isolated and disengaged. When we put them in a class together, we began to see walls break down and friendships develop.

Thematic Label 2

Facilitators' Perceived Positive Results of the 30/30 Program. The second thematic label, *facilitators' perceived positive results of the 30/30 Program*, was determined from four themes that emerged from the transcripts of the facilitators who were asked to describe the 30/30 Program. Table 10 displays the four themes related to thematic label 2 on perceived positive results of the program along with the number of facilitators referencing the themes.

Table 10

Thematic Label 2: Facilitators' Perceived Positive Results of the 30/30 Program

Themes	Number (%) Participants Expressing this Theme
Student establishment of trust and confidence with the facilitators	4 (100)
Development of positive behavior such as cooperation, discipline	4 (100)
Better student connection to the program	4 (100)
Increased student school attendance	4 (100)

The first theme, *establishment of student trust and confidence with the facilitators*, articulates that at-risk students learned to trust the intention of the facilitators. These facilitators emphasized that among the positive contributions the program gave to the school was that student participants saw facilitators' genuine commitment to help them. Facilitator #2 explained:

> As they [students] became more comfortable with the situation, as they became more aware and invited us truly in, when they recognized that it wasn't a judgment, that we were truly here to help them and they gained that trust, I saw improvement incrementally over time.

Facilitator #1 shared:

> The more we got to know our mentor groups, the more they began to share personal struggles that that sometimes impacted school. This gave me a chance to help them [students] through some of the struggles.

Facilitator #4 stated:

> Trust did not come as a result of one or two meetings with these students. Trust came as a result of our consistency with monthly meetings and frequent informal check-ins with the students. When students saw that our intent and commitment were genuine that established an element of trust.

Facilitator #3 shared:

> Trust was built through our monthly meetings and honest conversations.

The second theme, *development of positive behavior such as cooperation and discipline*, suggested that the established relationship of the facilitators with students fostered the development of trust and communication. The development of relational bonds made the students comfortable with their facilitators. Facilitator #3 described the development of positive behaviors of students because of the established relationship:

> Well at first they were a little apprehensive, a little questionable as to what they could expect, as would be expected. But as time went on there was an affinity, there was a relationship that grew with them. And a relationship that I think fostered, actually I would say, a lot of trust and a very communicative bond and relationship that allowed them to feel comfortable in talking and opening up and everything else. So I think that there definitely was a bridge built.

Facilitator #4 shared:

> Once we moved them to the same advisory class, I focused on their behavior referrals and communication skills. After some time, students began to seek out counsel and advice when it came to challenging school situations. Students were recognized for drops in behavior referrals. I received comments from other staff members regarding positive student behavior from many of the students in the 30/30 program.

Facilitator #2 shared:

> I noticed as time went on that I had less parents to call regarding student discipline.

Facilitator #1 shared:

> During our monthly meetings, we reviewed each student's discipline. Each month, they got better and better. Students began to show pride in the changes because we appalled them.

The third theme, *better student connection to the program*, emerged from the transcripts of the four facilitators. These facilitators related that the 30/30 Program activities encouraged students' connection with the program stakeholders and the objectives of the program. For instance, Facilitator #4 stated that, "the monthly incentives encourage the students or resulted in the students being more connected." Facilitator #3, on the other hand, claimed that students

"looked forward to" attending the program session and other extra-curricular activities involving other program participants. Facilitator #3 said:

> I think they [activities] impacted them very positively. They all looked forward to it. They all were engaged in it and, believe me, when there was an activity we had done, especially one that didn't have to happen just in the school, but rather outside the school, they most of the time lined up.

Facilitator #2 said:

> "You could tell students who at first did not want to be affiliated with the program changed. Not only were they proud to be 30/30 members, some asked if their friends could join."

As opposed to the school data on the students' performance, particularly in the area of school attendance (that show a decreasing attendance rate), the fourth theme, *increased students school attendance*, also emerged from the transcript of the four participants. These facilitators related that, with the positive behaviors the students demonstrated in classroom and extra-curricular activities, there was no doubt that school attendance would increase. Facilitator #3 said that the monitoring mechanism the program used improved the students' school attendance. Facilitator #3 said:

> I think the majority of them, I think when we were looking at the reports [attendance and class record reports], which we would do on a monthly basis, that we saw that their attendance did improve substantially across the board, and obviously that's attributed to the fact that they had a monitoring entity that was involved in their affairs academically on a daily basis, and they knew that.

Facilitator #4 shared:

> Many students in the 30/30 program would show up for school but would skip different classes. Once they knew we were checking, the attendance approved.

Thematic Label 3

Facilitators' Recommendations on Improving the Program. The third thematic label, *facilitators' recommendations on improving the program* was taken from the transcripts of the facilitators who were asked to describe the elements of the 30/30 Program that needed improvement. Table 11 displays the four themes related to thematic label 3, facilitators' recommendations on improving the program.

Table 11

Thematic Label 3: Facilitators' Recommendations on Improving the Program

Themes	Number (%) Participants Expressing this Theme
Improve mechanism on peer interaction	4 (100)
Increase the student-facilitator time	2 (50)
Formalize a sustainable and replicable program	2 (50)
Improve parental involvement	2 (50)

The first theme, *improve mechanism on peer interaction*, emerges from the transcript of the four facilitators. The theme suggests that, while social interaction is beneficial, these activities require the facilitators to monitor the compliance of the individual activity. Facilitator #2 said, "I do also think that they [students] gained a lot from the peer interaction and learning from what was working and what the issues were with some of their peers and what was working for them." Three of the facilitators shared that when social interactions were unmonitored, the students may have only used these activities for fun.

The second theme, *increase student-facilitator time*, emerged from the transcript of two of the facilitators. These facilitators claimed that guided instruction and coaching from the facilitator are essential in encouraging students to excel in the academic requirements.

Facilitator #2 said, “And by that, I mean maybe more meeting with the kids one-on-one more often, individually more often.” Facilitator #4 also said, “I can’t remember exactly how many meetings we had, but at a minimum, once a week, which I don’t even think is enough. Probably a couple of times a week.”

The third theme, *formalize a sustainable and replicable program*, emerged from the transcript of two of the facilitators. These facilitators claimed that, with the initial success of the program, the program stakeholders should formalize all essential program components that are proven effective. Facilitator #3 shared:

> Well I think packaging it into something sustainable and something that can be residually, consistently replicated on an ongoing annual basis is something that needs to be done… To then realizing the results that it did have which turned into it actually achieving positive results that actually had it receive an award from [the school district] as a Partnership Award, I think, speaks volumes. But I think now, as I said previously, packaging it into a formalized program that can be consistently replicated on an ongoing yearly basis is imperative.

The fourth theme, *parental involvement*, emerged from the transcript of two facilitators. These two participants indicated that the parents of the students participating in the program may need to be integrated into their student's school activities. In this manner, guided learning and sustainability of learned behaviors in school are ensured. Facilitator #2 said:

> I would involve the parents more from the onset, which we did an introduction for them and we capped it off with a nice celebration at the end. But I think that parental participation along the way is key and for many of these kids, not all, and I don’t want to generalize, but for some of these students, we had education gaps in their families as well.

Facilitator #4 shared:

Although we included parents in a few of our activities, I think if we were to do this again, parental involvement should be a bigger part of the program.

Thematic Label 4

Students' Perceived Intention with the Program. The fourth thematic label, *students' perceived intention with the program,* was taken from the transcripts of the student participants who were interviewed after they participated in the program. They were asked to describe their intention prior to their participation in the 30/30 Program. Table 12 displays the themes that emerged.

Table 12

Thematic Label 4: Students' Perceived Intention with the Program

Themes	Number (%) Participants Expressing this Theme
Intention to graduate from high school	10 (100)
Involvement of friends in the program	9 (90)
Received mentoring from the teachers	9 (90)
Improvement of grades and attendance	9 (90)

The first theme, *intention to graduate from high school,* emerged from the transcripts of the 10 participants. These students shared that their primary motivation in participating with the 30/30 Program was their desire to graduate from high school. These participants shared that being listed as at-risk students was their major academic concern. As such, their participation in the program was their chance to pursue college education. Student-participant #6 shared that, "[the principal] had given me a chance to be able to graduate. So, that's why I decided to go for it." Student-participant #10, on the other hand, recalled that she joined the program and tried as much as she could to graduate. She said, "I just remember it saying it would help us, you know,

be able to get out of school and graduate … not faster but period. And so I was just like, I don't know, I just wanted to give it a try." Student-participant #2 shared that "Ms. King wanted to help me because my grades were not so good." Student-participant #5 said that "one of my biggest fears beginning my freshman year was that I was not going to graduate on-time. This program helped me make it. By the time graduation came, I walked across the stage with all my friends." Student-participant #9 shared "I wanted to graduate from high school."

The second theme, *involvement of friends in the program*, emerged from the transcripts of nine students. These students said that their friends who were enrolled in the program motivated them to participate. For them, learning would be fun with their friends around. Student-participant #6 recalled:

> No, some [motivation came] from friends, but parents they suggested it; but I kind of took it more as like, okay, I get to work on my grades and I get to do it like around my friends. So it was just more me and like wanting to be around my friends also.

Student-participant #4 shared that, "I learned about it through a meeting….Other classmates, teachers." She claimed that most of her friends who were on the list submitted their intention to participate. She then gave the program a try. Student-participant #1 also shared, "I participated on my own, but also when I heard my friends were also going to be involved, it was also like, 'Okay, let's all do it.'" Student-participant # 2 shared that, "a lot of my peers when I joined seemed to be on the same page that I was. They lacked confidence and they were distracted." Student-participant #3 shared "I remembered that one of the other boys who joined was in my Major Time class. We didn't do a lot of talking not a lot of talking. But when we moved to the same Major Time class that changed."

The third theme, *received mentoring from the teachers*, emerged from the transcript of nine of the students. These students acknowledged that, without the help of adult facilitators,

completing the academic program would be difficult for them. Student-participant #5 shared that availability of the facilitators motivated him to enroll in the program. Student-participant #5 said:

> Definitely the mentorship. It always helps, especially at a young age, to have somebody older to guide you through any problem you might have. Even though you believe you know right from wrong, there's always somebody older who knows a little bit better. And I always had somebody to go to in case I needed help with anything.

Student-participant #1 stressed the importance of mentoring in accomplishing her academic tasks. She said that her intention in joining the program was to receive mentoring from the teachers involved in the program. She said she joined the program, "because it said that it will help us with mentoring. On the paper, I remember reading about mentoring and reading about an opportunity for students who need help with their grades." Student-participant #9 said "being in a class together where we can have our Major Time Teacher [Facilitator#4] and the rest of the teachers come help us with whatever we needed help with made a difference." Student-participant #2 shared that, "once we really got to know our mentors, I could go to her anytime I wanted."

The fourth theme, *improvement of grades and attendance*, emerged from the transcript of nine students. Student-participant #3 said, "improving grades especially, and attendance." Participant # 6 said, "At the time I definitely could use the help like from everybody as far as my grades. So that was my reason for joining." Student-participant #4 said, "I remember making that decision on my own, that probably joining would improve my grades." Student-participant #10 stated" I use to cut class all the time before I joined 30/30. I think each year got better." Student-participant #9 stated that, "I think it pushed me to come to school because I knew we would be reviewing attendance and grades. I knew I was going to hear trash talk from my

teacher." [Facilitator #4] Student-participant #7 said, "I am sure my grades got better because the adults were hands on and constantly talking about my grades to get me to improve them."

Thematic Label 5

Strengths of the Program. The fifth thematic label, *strengths of the program,* was taken from the transcripts of the student participants who were asked to describe the strengths of the program that motivated them to graduate high school. Table 13 displays the eight themes related to thematic label 5, strengths of the program.

Table 13

Thematic Label 5: Students' Perceived Strengths of the Program

Themes	Number (%) Participants Expressing this Theme
Close relationship of facilitators with students	10 (100)
Improves academic achievement	10 (100)
Improves students' attendance in school	10 (100)
Incentive mechanism	10 (100)
Grouping of friends in one class	8 (80)
Prepared students for college	4 (40)

The first theme, *close relationship of facilitators with students*, emerged from the transcript of the 10 students who participated. These students reiterated the positive attributes of the program identified by the facilitators. Student-participant #1 explained, "Because we can text our mentor and we're like, 'I have a question on this. We had that communication with the mentors out of school and in school. That helped if we needed help with anything." Student-participant #3 also stated, "I never thought I would be close with my Principal. I missed her most when I graduated." Student-participant #5 stated, "My mentor was like an uncle figure to me. He really cared. I remember wanting to be like him when I grow up." Student participant

#6 shared, “I really liked how all the mentors cared about us like we were their own kids.” Student-participant #7 stated that, “I remember my mentor [facilitator #1] did my hair and make-up for me for homecoming. I would not have gone if she didn’t push me to do so. I felt special because she did that for me.”

The second theme, *improved academic achievement*, also emerged from the transcript of all 10 students. The students explained that the guidance and the effort their mentor invested in them developed their positive attitude towards their academic responsibilities. Student-participant #3 said, “The mentors were always in our face like our parents would be.”

The third theme, *improves students' attendance in school*, emerged from the transcript of all 10 students. This theme is a reiteration of the perceived effect of the 30/30 program indicated by the facilitators who participated. Student-participant #1 explained that the daily monitoring of their facilitators and the forward-looking activities encouraged at-risk students to comply with the school requirement. Student-participant #1 said, “Yes, because it made me want to go to school, because it’s like facilitator # 4 would check up on us like, ‘Where are you? Why aren’t you in school’?”

The fourth theme, *incentive mechanism*, emerged from the transcript of the 10 students. Student participant #6 said, “That [incentives] always make everybody want to work harder.” Student-participant #8 added, “The prizes that were offered, yeah, that was my motivation to keep going.” Student-participant #10 said, “I had never been to DC before. When we did those things, I worked harder to get what they were giving us.” Student-participant #9 said with excitement, “The prizes were always cool and the best part of being in 30/30.” Student-participant #2 said, “Going to the Redskins game and meeting my favorite player was the highlight of my year.”

The fifth theme, *groupings of friends in one class*, emerged from the transcript of eight student-participants. This theme is a reiteration of a previously known benefit of social interaction identified by the participating facilitators-. Student-participant #3 explained:

> Yes, because it gave us the chance to speak with—somebody else is going to speak in the same group. We were all basically going through the same things, so if one person didn't speak up then the next person would and that obviously would get talked about.

Student-participant #4 shared that, "After moving us to the same Major Time class, we became a family." Student-participant #7 stated that, "being in [facilitator #4] Major Time class helped us get close. We were all in the same boat." Student-participant #10 said, "At first I was mad that I got moved from my original Major Time class, but I got why they did it. We all had the same issues and needed to be together to get better"

The sixth theme, *prepared students for college*, emerged from the transcript of four-student-participants. Student-participant #1 said:

> Because being a part of 30/30, I had my mentor who was in the community center. She would always, like, talk to us about college or help us if we needed help sending in our transcripts to colleges. We always had a Major Time with somebody who helped us during major time to get our work done.

Student-participant #8 said:

> They [facilitators] took us on a field trip to a college fair. I don't think I would have ever attended one if I were not in 30/30. I remember thinking for the first time that, yeah, this could be me one day.

Student-participant # 9 said, "Nobody ever talked to me about going to college before I joined 30/30."

Summary

The purpose of this mixed methods program was to evaluate the effectiveness of an innovative instructional strategy called the 30/30 Program for at-risk high school students. These

students often do not succeed academically and are often leaving high school without the proper reading and science skills to compete in the diverse global workforce of the 21st century. The present study focused on three outcomes: academic grades, improved attendance, and behavior at one Virginia public high school.

In the quantitative analysis of the data, two Mann-Whitney's U tests for independent samples were conducted to compare the academic performance and attendance rate of the 30/30 Program participants and a group of non-participants—referred to as the intervention and comparison groups, respectively. The results indicated that there were no statistically significant differences in the academic performance or the attendance rates of the two groups. Results were also reported for graduation rate and number of behavior incidents for each group.

In the qualitative analysis, two groups were recruited to participate in a semi-structured interview. Four facilitators and 10 students were interviewed. Using the thematic analysis method, I separated the responses and the emerging themes of both the facilitators and students. The analysis generated the following five thematic labels critical to the central question: (a) essential attributes of the 30/30 program, (b) facilitators' perceived positive results of 30/30 program, (c) facilitators' recommendations on improving the program, (d) students' perceived intention with the program, and (e) strengths of the program. The first three thematic labels emerged from the transcripts of the program facilitators while the last two thematic labels emerged from the transcripts of the former students. The themes associated with each thematic label were used to describe the perceptions of the students and facilitators regarding the 30/30 program.

These qualitative results will be discussed in Chapter 5 in relation to the quantitative findings and the relevant literature. Chapter 5 will also include the implications of these results and recommendations based on the study findings.

CHAPTER 5 DISCUSSION, IMPLICATIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This study was designed to add to existing literature by attempting to empirically determine the academic benefits of a newly implemented initiative—the 30/30 Program. The chapter begins with an overview of the study and a restatement of the five research questions used to provide insights on the effectiveness the 30/30 Program. This is followed by a summary of the results of the quantitative and qualitative analyses. A discussion of the results in relation to the literature review, a summary of limitations, and recommendations for further research are also included.

Overview of the Study

The Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 was the first effort of the federal government to curb the increasing gap in academic achievement between certain demographic groups (Barton & Coley, 2009). Several programs have been implemented to help alleviate the academic standing of all students. However, lack of success of programs for at-risk students (i.e., students coming from low income families) continues to alarm administrators. At-risk students comprise 17% of all public school students (Ladson-Billings, 2006). The challenges faced by these students extend beyond the classroom (Davis, 2003; Smith, 2007). These students will be part of the future workforce so educators must equip them with the skills necessary to contribute to an improved quality of life. Innovative programs and strategies must be continually explored to provide appropriate role models for these at-risk students (Tomlinson, 2005).

The 30/30 Program was developed as a way to help improve the overall development of struggling students. The program was named as such since 30 students were personally mentored by adult facilitators for 30 months, i.e., three school years. All facilitators met with the students on a regular basis and attended both academic and social activities. Students met with

facilitators in one-on-one and group meetings. Facilitators provided positive reinforcement by recognizing students who excelled in the group. The techniques used in the 30/30 Program can be implemented by other educational institutions in providing needed academic and social supports to at-risk students. The program, or an adaptation of it, may be used by other educators to improve their instructional practice.

Extensive current literature focuses on ascertaining the effectiveness of differentiated academic programs designed to meet the varying needs of diverse students. Therefore, empirical testing of the effectiveness of nontraditional instructional strategies such as the 30/30 Program is warranted.

This study used the following five research questions to frame it:

Research Question 1: How did the final academic grades of the participants in the 30/30 Program differ from those of the comparison group?

Research Question 2: How did the school attendance of the participants in the 30/30 Program differ from that of the comparison group?

Research Question 3: How did the number of reported disciplinary incidents of the participants in the 30/30 Program differ from those of the comparison group?

Research Question 4: How did the graduation rates of the participants in the 30/30 Program differ from those of the comparison group?

Research Question 5: What are the perceptions of the adult facilitators and student participants regarding the effectiveness of the 30/30 Program?

The study employed a mixed methods approach. The first four questions were addressed by analyzing the school data using Mann-Whitney's U and chi-squared tests, while the last question was addressed by the qualitative methodology of phenomenology. Fifty students from

the sample high school classified as at-risk were included in the study; 30 students who participated in the program comprised the intervention group and 20 who did not participate in the program comprised the comparison group.

Discussion of the Results

The results provided interesting insights into the effects of the implementation of the 30/30 Program in a school in Virginia. The overall results were mixed. While the quantitative results showed a lack of significant changes in outcomes, the qualitative responses provided insight into the perceived benefits of the program. Interestingly, the perceptions of both the facilitators and the students were in stark contrast to the quantitative results. This section briefly describes the study results in relation to the five research questions and compares the quantitative and qualitative findings. This is followed by a discussion of the results in light of the literature review.

Comparison of Quantitative and Qualitative Findings

The statistical analyses resulted in very few significant results. The two groups were comparable at baseline (freshman year) on two of the outcome variables: academic achievement and school attendance. Analysis of the results for these two variables resulted in no significant differences between the groups at the end of their fourth (senior) year. This suggests that the program had minimal impact on improving student academic achievement or attendance. A closer look at the data for academic achievement indicates the intervention group had a much larger standard deviation (SD) for the twelfth grade GPA than the comparison group (0.72 vs. 0.44, respectively) (see Table 2). In the case of attendance, the SDs were consistently higher than those of the comparison group. For example, the twelfth grade SDs were 26.5 and 6.23 respectively (See Table 4). Large SDs can reflect the existence of outliers. Regarding academic

performance, the intervention group had one student with a twelfth grade GPA of 0.143. Such outliers greatly influenced the results to some extent. This unexpected attendance result was influenced by three 30/30 Program students: two who became pregnant and one who spent time in Juvenile Detention Center (JDC), causing him to miss school.

Another explanation for the results may lie in differences between the intervention group and the comparison group. While the groups were not statistically different on the final outcomes, differences existed at the baseline. The control group had far fewer disciplinary incidents than the intervention group. The control group had a higher baseline GPA that just missed being statistically significant ($p = 0.051$) and a higher initial level of attendance (not significant). It is possible that the 20 members of the comparison group, who were considered at risk in the goal areas, possessed differences from the intervention group that influenced the results of this study. If so, the narrowing of the baseline differences by the end of 12^{th} grade may have been a worthwhile accomplishment of the program.

The behavioral results illustrate this type of improvement. The intervention group had 38 behavior incidents recorded in their freshman year while the comparison group had 6. At the end of their senior year, each group had 4. The intervention group's large number of behavior incidents prior to the beginning of the 30/30 Program suggests that, regarding behavior, the two groups were not comparable. In fact, the intervention group had many more behavior incidents recorded in school records than the comparison group. It is noteworthy that facilitator interviewees indicated that they believed the program resulted in the establishment of students' trust and confidence in the facilitators. These comments are in line with research findings by Harper (2007), Ladson-Billings (2006), and Gardner and Moran (2006) that support the notion that unacceptable social behaviors are directly associated with deprived cultural environments

and, as Tomlinson (2005) indicates, schools need innovative ways to provide appropriate role models for at-risks students to imitate and copy—something the large reduction in behavior incidents of the intervention group suggests the facilitators apparently accomplished . Indeed, these relationships may have provided the support needed for the behavior incidents to decrease from 38 in their freshman year to 16 after one school year of intervention and to four at the end of the senior year. Faculty shared their perception that the program promoted the development of positive behavior (e.g., cooperation, discipline) and better student connection to the program.

The most noticeable difference between the quantitative and qualitative results was in the area of attendance. The facilitator interviews revealed the perception that the attendance of participating students increased—a perception that is in contrast to the results of the quantitative analysis which revealed lower attendance of the intervention group compared to the comparison group. The interviews with faculty also revealed the perception that the program was successful in several arenas. In a related outcome, school records indicate that 4 of the students in the intervention group dropped out prior to graduation, compared to 2 students in the comparison group.

Discussion of the Findings in Relation to the Literature

The benefits of differentiated academic programs have been fairly mixed in current literature. This study further exemplified the contrasting views by both corroborating and contradicting existing studies. The lack of measureable benefit for academic achievement corroborates the findings of Somers and Piliawsky (2004). Similarly Fenzel and O'Brennan (2009) found that students expressed that having teachers and principals who were caring and supportive enhanced students' motivation for learning and becoming engaged with academic work. Nevertheless, Fenzel & O'Brennan (2009) found that these students' perceptions of

positive peer social climate did not influence their academic engagement or academic achievement. However, these finding are inconsistent with other studies that showed that students who attended mentoring (de Anda, 2001; Wyatt, 2009) and service learning programs (Scales et al., 2006) generally exhibited increased academic performance.

The lack of improvement in school attendance based on the school records is in contrast with the findings of studies of Sanchez et al. (2008) and Scales et al. (2006). These studies showed improved attendance of students who receive mentoring. In this study, the attendance data revealed that the SDs of the intervention group were consistently higher than those of the comparison group. For example, the twelfth grade SDs were 21.5 and 9.2 respectively (See Table 4). It appears that the attendance of the two groups would have been quite similar if not for the two pregnancies and the student who was sent to juvenile hall. However, this result still would be different than what the research literature suggests should be the case.

The lack of significantly different graduation rates for the intervention and comparison groups goes against the claims by Somers and Piliawsky (2004) and Somers et al. (2009). These studies found that having social support is critical to making students aspire to graduate from high school.

Despite the disappointing findings regarding attendance and graduation resulting from the quantitative analyses, the qualitative analysis revealed that the responses of both facilitators and students were generally positive. Both recognized the various contributions of the 30/30 Program in improving student-teacher collaboration and relationships. A possible reason for the facilitators' positive remarks is that the facilitators felt that they were making significant progress in connecting with students through the regular meetings and mentorship. The frequent interaction with and visibility of the students may have made the facilitators think that the

students regularly attended classes. It was also possible that the facilitators opted not to discuss negative outcomes because they felt to do so might reflect on the quality of their mentoring. Another possibility could be that two of the intervention participants had extremely low attendance rates in the 9th grade and significant improvement the following year. This improvement could have remained in the minds of the facilitators.

One of the essential attributes of the program, as stated by the facilitators, was the school leader's initiative to implement the program. Similar to the findings of Ylimaki et al. (2007), this study suggests that the principal plays a key role as an instructional leader. The educational staff generally follows the lead of the principal when it comes to the school's educational programs. The assessment and accountability mechanisms of standard-based school reforms forced educational leadership to search for innovative programs to turn around underperforming schools, especially at the high school level (Fleischman & Heppen, 2009). Therefore, the role of the principal becomes increasingly important in mobilizing the educational community to devise differentiated programs that could address the specific needs of the student body.

The 30/30 Program is similar to the small learning academies championed by Darling-Hammond and Friedlaender (2008) that aim to provide at-risk students with new opportunities for educational and career success. The advocates of differentiated learning contend that, compared to traditional teaching, small academies benefit from personalization, a rigorous and relevant curriculum, and professional learning and collaboration (Darling-Hammond & Friedlaender, 2008). Similarly, the facilitators noted that they began establishing trust and confidence with the students through better connections. Being able to properly communicate and meet with students on a regular basis fostered the development of positive behavior and increased student attendance much like Somers and Piliawsky (2004) noted in their study.

Fenzel and O'Brennan (2009) explained further that creating a respectful and supportive learning environment is conducive to the academic motivation of at-risk students. Stewart (2008) and Hoy et al. (2006) added that support for students and cooperation among teachers and administrators increased the levels of student achievement.

However, the facilitators may have focused too much on relationships and the social benefits of the program and failed to focus sufficiently on the goal of endeavoring to increase student grades. The desire to improve student relationships may have prompted the facilitators to recommend creating a mechanism to increase peer interaction. There was hardly any mention of increasing student grades from the facilitators despite the fact that it was one of the main motivations of the students for joining the program. As mentioned by the students, their main goal was to graduate high school. Better relationships with other students and facilitators were also cited as a motivation and strength of the program, but the ultimate assessment of whether a student should graduate is still primarily having good grades even though GPAs may not be the best index of academic achievement (Somers et al., 2009). Fleischman and Heppen (2009) noted that a program must be matched to its intended goals. Since the qualitative analysis suggests that the program can be successful in improving relationships, better focus should be given on how the program could improve student academic achievement.

Limitations

Chapter 1 presented two limitations that affected the analysis of the results. The first limitation pertained to the ability to generalize the results. Since only 30 students from a school in Virginia participated in the study, it can be argued that the sample size may not have statistically represented the entire student population of the country or even the whole state. Certain geographical biases may also be present due to the concentration of the study sample in

one area. Nevertheless, focusing on a small student group in a specific location helped to provide an in-depth description of the strengths and weaknesses of the 30/30 Program within the context of a particular school.

The second limitation pertains to the possibility that researcher bias could have been present in the data collection and analysis since I was involved in the implementation of the program. Thus there is the possibility that the interpretation of the findings may contain my preconceived notions and may not reflect a valid assessment of the program. The study mitigated this concern by ensuring that both the quantitative and qualitative data collection and analysis procedures were valid and reliable as explained in Chapter 3. In addition, I tried to limit interactions with students which could have influenced the responses to the differentiated education program.

Implications for Practice

Most students expressed their intent to join differentiated programs because of their desire to graduate. It is the responsibility of a state to equip educators with the necessary tools to enable them to help all students, including those at-risk, to graduate on time. Educators and policy makers should examine the results of this study to understand how an innovative differentiated program, although limited, may be enhanced to positively impact student outcomes. Since the quantitative results reflect a lack of significant difference in academic achievement and attendance between students attending the program and those that did not attend the program, the study serves as a challenge for educators to continue innovating and refining their program strategies for better results. The qualitative portion of the study offered suggestions and recommendations from the facilitators themselves on how to better improve the program. Additionally, the literature review provided excellent examples of successful

initiatives such as counselling interventions, mentoring, tutoring, and positive student-teacher interactions. While the 30/30 Program integrated mentoring and positive student-teacher interactions among students and their facilitators, other components may need to be integrated into the 30/30 Program approach in order to see positive academic outcomes. For example, studies have found that students who attended individual tutoring showed a respectable gain in grades (Hock et al., 2001; Nesselrodt & Alger, 2005). Certain aspects of these programs together with the mentoring and positive student-teacher interactions found in the 30/30 Program may result in improved student outcomes.

The study solicited recommendations from facilitators but failed to adequately obtain the perceptions of the students on what methods could help them benefit more from the program. Student input may help administrators identify strategies to influence positive student academic outcome. A critical hurdle for the facilitators is how to encourage academic achievement as a core outcome of the program. All facilitators mentioned how the program improves student behavior but they failed to discuss how their efforts were improving student grades. Aligning the goals of the facilitators with the goals of students, who wanted help attaining better grades, may strengthen the expected results of the programs.

For policy makers, more funding and additional support should be given to the development and refinement of effective programs that address the concerns of at-risk students. Since the positive effects of the 30/30 Program remain to be seen, implementing other, better documented programs in the study school might be a better use of the school's resources. Alternatively, maintaining the current strengths of the 30/30 Program (i.e., stronger student teacher and peer relationships) while refining strategies to improve student academic performance, attendance, and behavior may be the best route to follow. In any case, educational

leaders should continue to search for the best practices available to encourage greater academic performance of at-risk students and to use resources to test whether a chosen program actually works for their at-risk students.

Students and educators as well as society stand to benefit from successful non-traditional learning programs such as the 30/30 Program. For students, particularly those identified as at-risk, being accorded the right mentorship and environment could support greater academic and social potential. Educators, on the other hand, would become better informed and more effective in conducting their practice to generate a more able and learned workforce. Lastly, society will gain from having a successful and talented pool of young adults capable of paying taxes and being socially involved. Public safety is also improved if these students are discouraged from leading a life of crime through the realization of their own potential in contributing to society.

Recommendations for Future Research

The scope and limitations of the study have been focused on students that participated in the 30/30 Program in one school in Virginia. Future researchers could broaden the scope of the study or investigate the perceived benefits of other student intervention programs. I recommend the following expansions or topics:

1. *Expand the scope of the study to implement the 30/30 Program across a wide geographical location*. This study's small sample size may not have had enough explanatory power to result in significant results. To address the inability to detect significant changes as well as the possibility of geographic bias, future studies could attempt to more fully capture the effects of the 30/30 Program by expanding the number of students and schools. Conducting studies in other locations also alleviates the concern of researcher bias. Further, the results of studies conducted across states

or regions may help determine whether culture or location play a role in influencing how students respond to the 30/30 Program.

2. *Compare and contrast the benefits that students receive from the 30/30 Program with other student intervention programs.* The empirical results provided minimal evidence for the argument that the 30/30 Program is successful in improving student academic performance, attendance, and behavior. It would be useful to compare the results of the program with the results of other student intervention programs to provide a more valid cause for maintaining the 30/30 Program. The research could also identify several best practices of other programs that could be integrated into the 30/30 Program. Additionally, this recommendation could reveal what specific strategies are implemented by successful student intervention programs that are important in influencing student outcomes. With this information, the 30/30 Program could be refined or an entirely new program could be created to increase student academic achievement and attendance and decrease negative student behavior.
3. *Determine what facilitator characteristics or practices highly influence the success of the 30/30 Program*. The semi-structured interviews revealed that the facilitators played a vital role in realizing the perceived benefits of the program. Therefore, it is important to identify what facilitator characteristics and strategies are needed to increase the likelihood of the success of the program. This would allow current and potential facilitators to be fully equipped to deal with at risk students.
4. *Include the suggestions of students on how to improve the strengths of the program*. The qualitative component of this study focused solely on the perceptions of the facilitators and their recommendations on improving the program. It would be

interesting to find out whether the recommendations of the facilitators are aligned with the recommendations of students. The results could be used to ensure smoother program implementation.

Researcher Reflection

As both the researcher and an adult facilitator of this study, I was extremely surprised by the results of the quantitative study that the success of the program was not higher. Having worked with the participants for three years, I had a strong perception that their participation in the study had a substantive impact on the three target areas. It also appeared to me, as well as the other adult participants, that the relationships built with the student participants was another reason the results would have improved.

During the initial meeting with the students, many were not very happy about being invited (chosen) to participate. As the program evolved, positive changes were soon observed in their attitude towards the program. The students began to enjoy group experiences and the relationships that were fostered by the mentors. It is strongly believed, the 30/30 program or programs that address the needs of "at risk students" can help to close achievement and graduation disparity.

The results of the qualitative part of the study however, were not surprising. I am in total agreement with the responses of the adult facilitators and pleasantly astounded by the responses of the student participants during the interview process. Of the ten student participants I interviewed, I am convinced that participating in the 30/30 program helped the participants to graduate on time.

I would highly recommend a program analogous to the 30/30 program to all principals

who aspire to increase graduation rates. Schools have immediate access to student performance data? A program similar to the 30/30 program should begin in elementary school and continue throughout high school with the vertical articulation between elementary, middle and high school principals for best results. If I had remained principal of the participating high school, I would definitely implement the program with students entering ninth grade to help facilitate a successful graduation.

Conclusion

This study resulted in a mixed assessment of the 30/30 Program. The study lacked sufficient evidence that the program improved student performance. Based on the statistical tests, the program was not able to improve student academic achievement and behavior nor were graduation rates significantly improved. The interview data revealed that the perceptions of students and facilitators were generally positive toward the program. Most of the facilitators expressed a belief that they played a significant role in helping students develop positive behavior and in fostering peer interaction. The students confirmed these perceptions by stating that a major reason for joining the program was to be able to have closer relationships with their fellow students and teachers and to achieve academic success. These results challenge current educators to revisit the strategies employed by the 30/30 Program in order to improve its outcomes for students. The 30/30 Program sought to create an environment suitable for at-risk students to improve graduation rates. Future research on the 30/30 Program is recommended to include more at-risk students across a wide geographic location, compare and contrast the program's benefits with other academic intervention programs, determine what facilitator characteristics or practices are needed to increase positive influence on at-risk students, and include the suggestions of students on how to improve the program.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A Student Interview Questions

Instructions: This interview questionnaire is intended for all students who participated in the 30/30 program whether they graduated or not. Participation in the study is voluntary and may be withdrawn at any time during the interview. The following questions are intended to evaluate the performance of students who participated in the 30/30 program. All answers and personal information given will not be published in any form and will be kept confidential.

Demographic Profile
Name:
Age:
Year:

Semi-Structured Questions

1. How did you learn about the 30/30 program?
    a. What did you know about the 30/30 program before you participated?

2. What made you decide to participate in the 30/30 program?
    a. Did your friends/mentors/parents persuade you to participate in the 30/30 program?
    b. What was your main intention in participating in the 30/30 program?

3. What were your expectations from the 30/30 program?
    a. After completing the program, were your expectations met?
    b. If not, what were the reasons you felt that your expectations were not met?
    c. If yes, what were the reasons you felt that your expectations were met?
    d. What aspect/s of the 30/30 program do you think need/s improvement?
    e. What aspect/s of the 30/30 program do you think is/are commendable?

4. What are the different activities that were done in the 30/30 program that you think most helpful to you as a student?
    a. What can you say about the mentoring activities and schedules

   b. What can you say about the different field trips and alternative classes that were offered?
   c. What can you say about the monthly activities both inside and outside of school that were done?

5. Did the program offer you the opportunity to build relationships with the adults in the program? Did those relationships help you to do better in school? Please explain.

6. Did your academic grades and school attendance improve while you were in the program? Do you think the improvement/or absence of improvement in your academic grades and school attendance can be attributed to your participation in the 30/30 program? Why?
7. Do you think participating in the 30/30 program provided you with opportunities to do better in school than those students who did not participate in the program?

8. Did you think that putting all 30/30 participants in the same Major Time class made the program better? Please explain.

9. Did the incentives offered to you throughout the program serve as a motivator for you to do better in school?

10. Did you graduate from high school on time? If yes, do you believe that participation in the 30/30 program helped you to do so? If you did not graduate on time, what do you think was the reason?

11. As a student who did participate in the 30/30 program, what is your overall evaluation of the program?

Appendix B Facilitator Interview Questions

Instructions: This interview questionnaire is intended for facilitators in the 30/30 program. Participation in the study is voluntary and may be withdrawn at any time during the interview. The following questions are intended to evaluate the performance of students who participated in the 30/30 program. All answers and personal information given will not be published in any form and will be kept confidential.

Demographic Profile
Name:

Semi-Structured Questions

1. How did you learn about the 30/30 program?
    a. What did you know about the 30/30 program before you participated?

2. What made you decide to participate in the 30/30 program as a facilitator?
    a. Did your colleagues/mentors persuade you to participate in the 30/30 program?
    b. What was your main intention in participating in the 30/30 program?

3. What were your expectations from the 30/30 program?
    a. After completing the program, were your expectations of the students met?
    b. After completing the program, were your expectations as a facilitator met?
    c. If not, what were the reasons you felt that your expectations were not met?
    d. If yes, what were the reasons why you felt that your expectations were met?
    e. What aspect/s of the 30/30 program do you think need/s improvement?
    f. What aspect/s of the 30/30 program do you think is/are commendable?
    g. How did the monthly activities impact the students?
    h. Do you think that the grouping of students with facilitators was effective?
    i. Did you think the incentives offered to the students motivated them to do better?

j.

k. Do you think the time spent between the students and facilitators needs to be increased?

4. Do you think the improvement/or absence of improvement in your student's academic grades and school attendance can be attributed to your participation in the 30/30 program? Why?

5. Do you think participating in the 30/30 program provided students an advantage over those who did not participate? Why?

6. As a facilitator, what are your comments regarding the attitudes and behavior of your students during the 30/30 program?
    a. Other than final grades and school attendance, is there a difference between those students who participated in the 30/30 program and those who did not?
    b. Did the attendance of the students who participated improve? If yes, why do you think it did.
    c. Did the grades of the students who participated in the 30/30 program improve? If yes, why do you believe they did?
    d. Did the behavior referrals of the students in the 30/30 program decrease? If yes, why do you think they did?
    e. Did the overall behavior of the students who participated in the 30/30 program improve? If yes, why do you think it did?

7. As a facilitator, what was your overall evaluation of the program?

Appendix C IRB Approval Document

VirginiaTech

Office of Research Compliance
Institutational Review Board
North End Center, Suite 4120, Virginia Tech
300 Turner Street NW
Blacksburg, Virginia 24061
540/231-4606 Fax 540/231-0959
email irb@vt.edu
website http://www.irb.vt.edu

MEMORANDUM

DATE: October 9, 2013

TO: William Joseph Glenn, Nardos Eleanor King

FROM: Virginia Tech Institutional Review Board (FWA00000572, expires April 25, 2018)

PROTOCOL TITLE: An Examination of the Effectiveness the 30/30 program on the Academic Achievement of High School Students

IRB NUMBER: **13-691**

Effective October 8, 2013, the Virginia Tech Institution Review Board (IRB) Chair, David M Moore, approved the New Application request for the above-mentioned research protocol.

This approval provides permission to begin the human subject activities outlined in the IRB-approved protocol and supporting documents.

Plans to deviate from the approved protocol and/or supporting documents must be submitted to the IRB as an amendment request and approved by the IRB prior to the implementation of any changes, regardless of how minor, except where necessary to eliminate apparent immediate hazards to the subjects. Report within 5 business days to the IRB any injuries or other unanticipated or adverse events involving risks or harms to human research subjects or others.

All investigators (listed above) are required to comply with the researcher requirements outlined at:

http://www.irb.vt.edu/pages/responsibilities.htm

(Please review responsibilities before the commencement of your research.)

PROTOCOL INFORMATION:

Approved As:	**Expedited, under 45 CFR 46.110 category(ies) 6,7**
Protocol Approval Date:	**October 8, 2013**
Protocol Expiration Date:	**October 7, 2014**
Continuing Review Due Date*:	**September 23, 2014**

*Date a Continuing Review application is due to the IRB office if human subject activities covered under this protocol, including data analysis, are to continue beyond the Protocol Expiration Date.

FEDERALLY FUNDED RESEARCH REQUIREMENTS:

Per federal regulations, 45 CFR 46.103(f), the IRB is required to compare all federally funded grant proposals/work statements to the IRB protocol(s) which cover the human research activities included in the proposal / work statement before funds are released. Note that this requirement does not apply to Exempt and Interim IRB protocols, or grants for which VT is not the primary awardee.

The table on the following page indicates whether grant proposals are related to this IRB protocol, and which of the listed proposals, if any, have been compared to this IRB protocol, if required.