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Saturday Academy: Student, Parent, and Teacher Perceptions of an Intervention for  
At-Risk Middle School African American Students in a High Poverty School

by

Melody Latrice Witherspoon

A Dissertation submitted to the Education Faculty of Lindenwood University

in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the

degree of

Doctor of Education

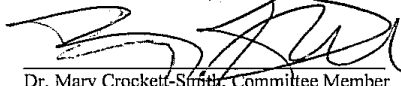
School of Education

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This dissertation has been approved as partial fulfillment of the requirements for the  
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 Dr. Beth Kania-Gosche, Dissertation Chair	<u>5-6-11</u> Date
 Dr. Mary Crockett-Smith, Committee Member	<u>5-6-11</u> Date
 Dr. Graham Weir, Committee Member	<u>5-6-11</u> Date

Declaration of Originality

I do hereby declare and attest to the fact that this is an original study based solely upon my own scholarly work here at Lindenwood University and that I have not submitted it for any other college or university course or degree here or elsewhere.

Full Legal Name: Melody Latrice Witherspoon

Signature: Melody D. Witherspoon Date: May 06, 2011

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## **Abstract**

I examined the perceptions of parents, students, and teachers of Saturday Academy, an intervention for students who are at risk of failing academically. The problem is that nearly half of students who attend high school may be at risk of dropping out before they graduate. The purpose of this study was to describe, evaluate, and analyze the perceptions of students, parents, and teachers of Saturday Academy. This study is significant because at-risk students are in need of an intervention that helps them to be successful at school.

The study was conducted in a small middle school within a large school district. The middle school includes grades seven through eight and services approximately 338 students. Ninety-five percent of the student body receives free or reduced lunch. The school is a high poverty school.

The general research question was, how do students, teachers, and parents perceive Saturday Academy influences student engagement, parent engagement, and peer engagement? Qualitative research methodology, consisting of students, teachers, and parent questionnaires and interviews, was used to examine stakeholder perceptions of Saturday Academy. Quantitative data were collected that included MAP scores, Gates McGinnity Reading Test scores, discipline records, classroom grades, and attendance records to verify the qualitative findings.

Results revealed that parents perceived the intervention as a constructive activity in which their child could participate on a Saturday. However, parents reported that they were not sure whether the intervention met the academic needs of their child. The students' perception of the intervention was in general the same as their parents, reporting that Saturday Academy was fun for the student. Students liked the field trips, and they learned new things. Teachers

perceived the intervention to be positive, but perceived that it was not the best solution to the problem because there is no one size that fits all. Most of the teachers believed some of the goals of Saturday Academy were met, but most of them had suggestions for improvement. In conclusion, the findings of the qualitative study involving parents, teachers, and students revealed important information about an intervention for at-risk students that could be generalized to other at-risk student interventions.

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## Chapter I: Introduction

An intervention to successfully assist students who are at risk of failing presents a challenge to K-12 educators. A multitude of interventions at all levels including national, state, and local have been implemented, but many have failed. This challenge exists because as interventions have been created, developed, and implemented, they do not always apply to all at-risk students. Being at risk implies a certain worrisome likelihood of occurrence for events such as low scholastic achievement and dropping out of high school (Rozycki, 2004). Some interventions have elements that work, while others do not. The goal of any intervention such as this one is to maximize the potential of each student, and help each graduate and become a productive citizen. The interventions have failed when these students have dropped out or become adults who are unable to read, under or unemployed, or adjudicated from the criminal justice system. Even after many tries, educational leaders still search for the successful intervention that will help at-risk students to become successful.

Lessard, Fortin, Marcotte, Potvin, and Royer (2009) revealed that over 40% of students who attend high school may be at risk of dropping out before they graduate. In conjunction, nearly 20% of American students live in poverty, and unlike their more affluent peers, these students achieve academically at much lower levels. In order to impede inequality, poverty, and limited opportunity that place tremendous constraints on the United States resources, citizens of this nation should aptly support education. The odds can be changed by using the science that works, creating a more promising future for millions of students growing up in susceptible conditions (Neuman, 2009).

For over 40 years, high school dropouts have caused a concern; they are primarily students who are minorities and live in poverty. There are a large number of students in the

middle grades who do not stay on the path that leads to graduation. These students can be identified early by using indicators such as discipline incidents, attendance, and grades.

Typically, when middle grade students are failing at least one course, suspended or expelled, and fail to attend school, they become disengaged, which leads to eventually dropping out of school (Balfanz, Herzog, & MacIver, 2007). The United States led the world in high school graduation 30 years ago. It now ranks number 18 among industrial nations (Whitaker, 2010).

Taxpayers pay more than eight billion dollars a year in public assistance programs like food stamps and the annual loss in earnings, among the unemployed, is \$300 billion (Whitaker, 2010). High school dropouts are more likely to be unemployed or incarcerated (Whitaker, 2010). During the next decade more than 12 million students will drop out of high school if graduation rates remain the same. The nation will then lose three trillion dollars (Alliance for Excellent Education, 2007). Thus, successful interventions to keep at-risk students in school, beginning in grades six through eight, are important to the future of the United States.

### **Background of the Study**

Being at risk indicates a possible confrontation with something undesirable (Rozycki, 2004). Being at risk implies a certain worrisome likelihood of occurrence for events such as low scholastic achievement and dropping out of high school (Rozycki, 2004). At risk has become an adjective characterizing a broad variety of people. Some are deemed at risk because they are a minority or their primary language is not English, others because they spend their afternoons without parental supervision, some because of their lower socioeconomic status, and others who by birth or circumstances have barriers that either prevent or constrain them from possessing basic rights and duties (Levin, 2008).

Often derived from years of failing academically, social problems, and suspensions, at-risk students deliberately make the decision to drop out of school. The strategies to prevent student dropout should begin prior to the ninth grade; therefore, dropout prevention strategies should be designed for middle school patrons rather than to high school patrons (“The Importance of Teacher-Student Relationships in Middle School”, 2010). This study will focus on this often overlooked population.

In the United States middle schools, 20 million diverse, briskly changing 10-to15-year-olds enroll daily. These students are making complicated choices as they enter middle school. Early adolescents assemble values, attitudes, and habits of mind that will, for the most part, give direction to their manner of conducting themselves as adults. This key phase of life is when they are entitled to schools that fully support them. Between the ages of 10 and 15, young people are subjected to more accelerated complex personal changes than any other time in their lives. Youth of the same gender and chronological age are overwhelmed by this period of early adolescence where instability exists. A commonality in every area of their development is contradictory rates of growth. The intensity to necessarily identify areas of development—physical, emotional, intellectual, social and moral—is relentless. Adolescents’ academic success may depend on other developmental needs being met, like their physical changes associated with puberty, the increasing ability to think abstractly, and the importance of social acceptance (National Middle School Association, 2003).

Middle school students struggle with a sense of identity, and they are more likely to express feelings by actions than by words. Their peer group influences their interests and clothing style, and students are mostly interested in the present and near future (“Adolescent Development”, 2010). In most cases, it becomes intense for middle school students to gain

acceptance from their peers, and the need to belong to particular social groups. This may lead to a changing of allegiance from adults to peers. The media and other young adolescents progressively influence those issues of good and bad, right and wrong, and appropriate and inappropriate (National Middle School Association, 2003). There are reasons why students respond differently. Educators must be aware and understand how they respond to their learning environment if they are to understand the schooling of young adolescents.

Druin and Butler (1987, as cited in Rozycki, 2004) provided a list of correlates for students who are at risk. According to their research, students who (a) are living in high-growth states, (b) have parents who have dropped out of high school, (c) are part of a low-income family, (d) live in districts that lack stability, (e) speak English as their second language, (f) have low self-esteem, (g) are bored and alienated, (h) pursue other alternatives like seeking employment, or (i) are starting a family early are all at risk. Within these characteristics that correlate with being at risk, the causes of being at risk can possibly be defined.

A successful intervention for at-risk students should include attainable goals that are clear, student progress that is carefully observed, high expectations for all, and understandable rules for behavior enforced by family. Research has shown that these elements are effective when successful programs for at-risk students use them (Rozycki, 2004). Additional elements have been used successfully in a variety of school reform efforts. For example, No Child Left Behind, NCLB, offers four principles, to follow when implementing an intervention for at-risk students, all of which are clear and attainable. The first NCLB principle is a greater role for parents in their children's educational programming, which includes more choices for parents. Parents are able to transfer their children to a better performing school, once the school their child is attending has not met state standards for at least two consecutive years. The second



principle is the use of research based educational practices. The third principle is more freedom for states and communities. Unprecedented flexibility is given to states; they have more flexibility than ever before when using federal education funds. The last principle is stronger accountability for results. Achieving academic proficiency is the main goal with stronger accountability. Following these principles should be a predictor of the achievement gap closure.

Some of the factors that make the interventions for at-risk students difficult to implement and manage include (a) teachers who do not share the belief or cooperate in the implementation of the interventions, (b) students who are nonresponsive to interventions, (c) student resources such as materials that are necessary for the success of the intervention are not supplied, (d) the hiring of ineffective teachers, and (e) lack of support from families of those students who participated in the interventions. Most research measures the success of interventions for at-risk students quantitatively. As a result of using these successful interventions, schools have increased student achievement, raised test scores, increased attendance, and increased enrollment in advanced courses. For this study, more qualitative indicators such as student and parent perceptions were used than quantitative indicators such as MAP scores. These qualitative indicators are important because an intervention was explored that was voluntary and had a small sample size.

### **The Problem Statement**

The problem is that nearly half of students who attend high school may be at risk of dropping out before they graduate (Whitaker, 2010). The research question was as follows: How do students, teachers, and parents perceive Saturday Academy influences student engagement, parent engagement, and peer engagement? The purpose of this study was to observe, describe,

evaluate and analyze the perceptions of students, parents, and teachers of Saturday Academy, an intervention for students who are at risk of failing academically.

### **Significance of the Study**

This study is significant to the teaching profession because at-risk students are in need of an intervention that helps them be successful in school. This study provides perceptions of students, parents, and teachers who have participated in an intervention. Their perceptions are important to improving the program and the student experience.

### **Description of the Program**

Saturday Academy, also known as The Smart Academy, is an enrichment and accelerated non-traditional learning experience aligned with (a) Missouri grade level and course level expectations, (b) the Missouri Show-Me standards, and (c) Water Valley School District curricular requirements. The attendance goal of the Academy at the time of the study was to enroll at least 10% of the student population. Lessons are fast paced inside and outside the classroom with teachers who used relevant content that is rigorous but relationship-based.

The Smart Academy has a 15:1 student to staff ratio. The academy's staff, which consists of four certified district teachers, establishes individual achievement plans, and then measures students' gains using a schedule to set goals and a time frame within which the goals should be met. The Smart Academy participants are provided with the opportunity to visit local colleges and universities, as well as a monthly field experience. For example, students have the opportunity to actually fly an airplane. This experience began with flight simulation at the Science Center, followed up with a visit to a local airport where the students fly a plane with a trainer. It is offered at no cost, and transportation is provided along with a light snack.

Middle school students can participate in this program on Saturdays from September to May, 8:00 a.m. to 12:00 p.m. Their regular meetings are held at Water Valley Middle School in the classrooms of the teachers who staff the Saturday Academy. All of the instruction and activities take place under the supervision of certified classroom teachers and the Water Valley School District staff members.

Participants do not receive homework or grades in Saturday Academy. The expectations of the Saturday Academy do not align with students completing homework or receiving grades. Saturday Academy was designed to be a learning experience, an experience gained through lessons conducted inside and outside of the classroom. Students participated in most if not all of the Saturday sessions. Even though the attendance policy is not in writing, the expectation of participants of the Saturday Academy is that they attend regularly.

Most of the participants are involved in extracurricular activities outside of school and some of the students' involvement in other extracurricular activities conflict with their participation in Saturday Academy. For example, some of the participants play sports, have to serve detentions, or have obligations in the community and these activities conflict with their participation in Saturday Academy. In this study, there were approximately 12 students who started the year off with Saturday Academy, but all twelve of the students did not complete the program, this could possibly be due to those students participation in extracurricular activities outside of school. The student participants of the study attended Saturday Academy regularly.

Saturday Academy was designed to accelerate the reading and math skills of low-performing students (primarily students scoring Below Basic and Basic on the MAP in grades seven and eight). The Saturday Academy staff members established individual achievement plans, goals, and timetables to measure Saturday Academy student gains.

The Saturday Academy schedule includes, but is not limited to, the following weekly schedule:

- Physical activity for up to 30 minutes because being healthy is smart and a knowledgeable choice
- Verbal and written personal reflections for 30-60 minutes: A few topics for reflection include the following: Who am I? Who do others say I am? Where am I from? Where am I going? What is character? What is success?
- Writing and language arts for 30-60 minutes: Students partake in small group instruction on writing, spelling, dictionary, computer skills, basic grammar, and storytelling
- Oral and instructional reading for 30-60 minutes: An intensive reading of text that is real, relevant, rigorous, and relationship based. Saturday Academy students also covered vocabulary development, reading influence, and reading comprehension.
- Mathematics from 30-60 minutes: This covers the language of mathematics, logic, and real-world applications of algebra, geometry, trigonometry, calculus, number literacy, and more.
- Weekly advice, feedback, recognition, and points for a certificate of completion and reward

The Eagle Bill School District created the Saturday Academy because of its strong belief regarding high achievement for all. Another belief is that all students are smart and become even more so with support such as the Saturday Academy. One of the last reasons for creating the Saturday Academy was due to the belief that all students deserve equitable access to post secondary education, field experiences, and teaching and learning from high quality, caring teachers in a small group setting. Although the Academy was funded from the district's budget

the previous year, with all the budget cuts the district is currently facing, it anticipates funding coming from the School Improvement Grant that is funded through the current educational reform “Race to the Top,” in hopes of offering the program in the future.

The school that is the focus of this study, Water Valley Middle School, serves students grades seven and eight. The student population is approximately 350 students, with the majority being characterized as at risk. Saturday Academy was implemented in the 2008-2009 school year, and the entire student body was invited to participate. In 2009-2010 Saturday Academy was again offered to students. Water Valley Middle School is a school that has not met Annual Yearly Progress (AYP) for the past three years. Saturday Academy is an intervention, designed with the goal of meeting state standards which would help students who are failing academically to achieve academic success.

The United States Department of Education has been slowly approving state applications for School Improvement Grants (SIG), which targets the worst 5% of schools in the country. In March 2010, it approved Missouri’s initial steps in the process, which could bring \$50 million to such schools. (Hunn, 2010, p. E31)

As soon as the 2010-2011 school year is complete, overhauls are planned for 37 of the worst schools in the area. The school district in this study has two schools that are on that list, one of which is Water Valley Middle School. The district has opted to overhaul the school with the Transformation Model. Meeting the requirements of the Transformation Model, should afford the district the opportunity to apply for SIG monies and be awarded a piece of the \$3.5 billion in federal dollars. Upon receipt of the SIG, the district may commit to having the Saturday Academy for the life of the grant.

Schools' leaders must evaluate interventions to determine whether or not they are working. Ultimately, interventions should intercede on the behalf of the students who are at risk of failing academically. Another reason why interventions should be evaluated is because some are expensive to implement and run. If the Eagle Bill School District receives funds from SIG and is able to provide Saturday Academy again the following school year, it is anticipated that the cost of the program will be approximately \$165,000.

The results of this qualitative program evaluation of the Saturday Academy will add to the existing knowledge of interventions that are being implemented to help students who are at risk of failing academically. Even though many interventions have been created and implemented at the study school district, none have paralleled the Saturday Academy in quality. Although different versions of Saturday Academy exist, the implementation used by Eagle Bill School District is noteworthy. It is unique in that it is designed to focus on real, relevant, rigorous, and relationship-based learning with fast-paced lessons inside and outside of the classroom and a targeted goal of at least 10% of the student population.

### **Definition of Key Terms**

At-risk students: A student's probability of failing academically, and/or dropping out of school, classifies them as at-risk students. Subpopulations that are identified as likely to drop out of school or perform poorly are at-risk students (e.g., students who have experienced grade retention). Early identification and intervention are programmatic responses involved in prerequisites for interventions for at-risk students.

Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP):

This is one of the essential elements of NCLB and probably the most complicated. To achieve the goal of all children being "proficient" (as defined by each state) by 2014, all

public schools and districts must make satisfactory improvement each year toward that goal. Based on criteria included in NCLB, the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education has established specific annual targets for AYP in Communication Arts and Math. (Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, 2010, para.1)

Free and Reduced Lunch: Any child at a participating school may purchase a meal through the National School Lunch Program. Students from families with incomes at or below 130% of the poverty level are eligible for free meals. Those with incomes between 130% and 185% of the poverty level are eligible for reduced price meals for which students can be charged no more than 40 cents. For the period July 1, 2009 through June 30, 2010, 130% of the poverty level was \$28,665 for a family of four, and 185% was \$40,793 (National School Lunch Program, 2011).

Intellectual Development: A series of stages through which students make qualitative changes as they acquire new knowledge. In stage one, there is the sensory motor period, which is before the appearance of language. The period from about two to seven years of age is stage two. The pre-operational period is what precedes real operations. Stage three is the period from seven to 12 years of age, a period of concrete operations—the last stage of intellectual development. Finally, after 12 years of age, the period of formal operations or propositional operations is the last stage (Piaget & Inhelder, 1969).

Missouri Assessment Program (MAP): MAP is one of several education reforms mandated by the Outstanding Schools Act of 1993. As a result of this Act, the state Board of Education directed the Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (MODESE) to identify the knowledge, skills, and competency that Missouri students should acquire by the time they complete high school and to evaluate student progress toward those

academic standards. The Department engaged teachers, school administrators, parents, and business professionals from throughout the state to develop the Show Me Standards/GLE Strands and the assessment system that evaluates students' proficiency as represented by the Show Me Standards/GLE Strands (MODESE, 2007).

**Middle School:** A school between elementary school and high school, usually having three or four grades, variously including grades five through eight. In this study, Water Valley Middle School teaches seventh and eighth graders.

**No Child Left Behind (NCLB):** In January 2002 President George W. Bush signed the NCLB Act. It reauthorized the existing Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA). NCLB made the most sweeping changes in federal law regarding public schools in nearly 40 years.

**Saturday Academy:** It is an enrichment and acceleration non-traditional learning experience that is aligned with Missouri grade level and course level expectations, the Missouri Show Me Standards, and the Eagle Bill School District curricular requirements. The focus is on real, relevant, rigorous, and relationship based (conceptual) learning and fast paced lessons inside and outside of the classroom with at least 10% of the student population of the school. Saturday Academy is also known as Smart Academy.

**School Improvement Grant (SIG):** These are grants awarded by the U.S. Department of Education to state education agencies under the ESEA of 1965. Then subgrants are awarded to local school districts for the purpose of supporting focused school improvement efforts in the lowest-performing schools (U.S. Department of Education, 2010).

**Socioeconomic Status (SES):** An individual or group position within a hierarchical social structure. Socioeconomic status depends on a combination of variables, including occupation,



education, income, wealth, and place of residence. Sociologists often use SES as a means of predicting behavior.

**Special Education Services:** Services for the student population who are in special education programs or receive special education services and includes students with identified and non identified exceptionalities, but excludes students identified as gifted (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2009).

**Transformation Model:** A school reform model which calls for replacement of the principal, development of the teachers and leaders, reform of the curriculum and extended teacher planning time. In exchange, selected schools are able to apply for a portion of the \$3.5 billion in federal dollars. Schools using the Transformation model must (a) replace the principal who led the school prior to implementing the model; (b) use evaluation systems for teachers and principals that take into account student growth and assessments; and (c) reward school leaders, teachers, and other staff who, in implementing this model have increased student achievement and high school graduation rates. Additionally, schools using the Transformation model must remove those who, after professional development, have not (a) provided high-quality, job embedded professional development; (b) implemented strategies to recruit, place, and retain; (c) used data to implement an aligned instructional program; (d) promoted the use of data to inform and differentiate instruction; (e) provided increased learning time for students and staff; (f) provided mechanisms for family and community engagement; and (g) given the school sufficient operational flexibility (Hunn, 2010).

## **Summary**

The local, state, and national level have all tried to intervene on behalf of at risk students with implementing interventions. An exploration of an intervention that will successfully assist

students who are at risk of failing presents the challenge. The most recent studies have demonstrated the need for interventions and studies have shown the monetary and cost to the United States as a whole. There are many definitions of at risk, but they all seem to result in students failing academically. Middle schools students are the focus of the study and will be described in Chapter 3. Researchers have found that dropout prevention strategies should be designed for middle school students as opposed to high school students; therefore, this study will focus on this often-overlooked population. This qualitative program evaluation of the intervention, Saturday Academy, will add to the existing knowledge of interventions that are being implemented to help students who are at risk of failing academically. As this chapter concludes and Chapter 2 begins, a presentation of the knowledge base upon which the study was built will be shown.

## Chapter II: Literature Review

The National Governor's Association defines at-risk students according to the one characteristic this varied group is said to have in common, a deficiency in basic skills. A lack of adequate basic skills including the ability to read, write, compute and communicate is the one characteristic that the school dropout, the teenage parent, the criminally involved, and the socially dependent youth typically have in common (Donmoyer & Kos, 1993). Where there is poverty, lack of employment, unmarried childbearing, violence, unfriendliness, absent parents, and an increasing number of families who struggle to survive, at-risk students are found. These families are oppressed and incapacitated by the conditions of their lives. Students living under the aforementioned circumstances do not necessarily have the opportunity to acquire skills that are necessary to be successful in school. There are characteristics such as self-discipline, determination, and constructive service that are not being modeled for these students (Donmoyer & Kos, 1993).

At-risk students often suffer from a wide variety of emotional and physical problems. Chronic truancy, suspensions, and disruptive behaviors are a few school problems that young people who are at-risk experience. Teenagers who begin families but lack education or skills to support a family are also at-risk (Donmoyer & Kos, 1993). Students become at-risk for a variety of reasons.

Student, parent, and teacher perceptions of an intervention used for at-risk students were explored in this study. These indicators were used to frame both the literature review and the results of this study: student engagement, parent engagement, and peer engagement. The following topics will be reviewed in the literature: African American students at risk, resiliency, motivation, engagement, factors that influence student achievement, and intervention.

### **African American Students at Risk**

There are a large number of African American students who perpetually combat deficiencies in their environment. As the inward as well as the outward problems grow, the longer students struggle through deficits and financial issues. Poor school performance and serious criminal offenses, such as burglary, are connected with student families from a low SES. When a family's SES is controlled, the differences between cultures in achievement decline (Donmoyer & Kos, 1993). In discerning the achievement of African American students, it is essential to examine a family's SES.

Research implies that the shifting associated with characteristics of low SES neighborhoods (e.g., rate of unemployment or rate of poverty) are joined with an intensification in delinquent behavior, problems in school, and wayward peers. Research on the effects of a neighborhood upon a student seems sparse. While other research findings have disclosed that as the degree of low income families grow in a neighborhood, the negative outward behavior of students intensifies (Paik & Walberg, 2007).

Families' SES is related to children internalizing (e.g. depression) and externalizing problems (e.g. conduct problems, problem behavior) (Paik & Walberg, 2007). With African American students (ages 10-11 years), negative economic events and low family income are associated with externalizing behavior and internalizing symptoms (Paik & Walberg, 2007).

**Situational factors that lead to becoming an at-risk student.** Multiple factors increased the probability that students will fail at school and drop out. There is a high correlation with students' demographic characteristics, especially gender, race or ethnicity, and SES. Early school experiences and family background have been assigned five factors that increase the likelihood of dropping out of high school. These factors include changing schools two or more

times beyond the normal progression, coming from a single parent household, having an older sibling who dropped out of high school, having poorer than average grades, and repeating an earlier grade. At the eighth grade level, the risk factors are virtually identical: two or more school changes between first and eighth grade, average grade of C or lower from sixth to eighth grade, and a grade repeated from first to eighth grade (Paik & Walberg, 2007); thus, the importance of studying the middle school population.

**Indicators that lead to becoming an at-risk student.** The indicators used are based on both the number of risk factors and their level of risk. “One risk factor is recognized as low risk; two risk factors composed moderate risk; and students with three or more risk factors were considered to be at high risk of dropping out” (Horn & Chen, 1998). Indicators, which are also known as engagement indicators, are viewed as risk factors. They are as follows: student engagement, parent engagement, peer engagement, and college preparation activities.

The first engagement indicator, student engagement, is determined by the number of extracurricular activities students report participating in and attending. The second engagement indicator, parent engagement, is based on two parents and determined by the parents’ educational expectations for their child and how involved they are with their child’s schooling. The third engagement indicator, peer engagement, is determined by two self-report indicators for peer engagement that are included in the models. The first self-report indicator for peer engagement is the measure of importance that students place on what their friends attribute to learning activities and the second self-report indicator for peer engagement is their friend’s post-secondary plans. The last engagement indicator is college preparation activities. Assembling information on outreach programs such as Upward Bound, learning about financial aid, enrolling in special courses for entrance exam preparation, and receiving assistance from their high school

teachers or staff in preparing for college along with financial aid applications were activities that were included in college preparation (Horn & Chen, 1998). Ultimately, students are being prepared to graduate from high school and to pursue a higher education.

**Components of the at-risk student's background.** Discipline problems are one component of the at-risk student's background. Racial inconsistencies in school discipline prevail, even though there is no research to support that African American students misbehave more than other students (Adams, 2008). Government data shows that African American students in American schools may be treated unfairly, when it comes to discipline (Adams, 2008). The discipline problem and academic achievement are familiarly interconnected. Problems of unfairness predicated on race are mostly restricted to discipline. Failing to graduate, being taught by inexperienced teachers, being referred to special education services, and lower test scores on standardized tests are all experiences that African American students are more likely than others to experience (Adams, 2008). The reason why this exists is because there are inequities in the educational system.

Social class is another component of the at-risk student's background, and it has a philosophical influence on academic achievement, notably due to the fact that better funded schools are attended by students from higher socioeconomic groups. Student achievement is impacted by the way classes are conducted and how well classes are organized. The variation in educational achievement can to some degree be explained by classroom structure and SES, social class, and its relationship to the school attended (Conchas, 2006). Parent education programs might also prove necessary. A total guarantee of free and effortlessly accessible child health care, including free eyeglasses, is probably required. Another necessity might be crucial efforts to promote greater respect for education and the educators who provide it—serious long-range

efforts to bolster an overpowering change in the national standpoint (Clabaugh, 2007). It is beneficial for schools to be cognizant of all of the circumstances that surround and affect at-risk students, and then use the research for the betterment of engaging this challenging group of students.

**The experiences of at-risk African American students.** Education for at-risk students who are African American is vastly different from other ethnic groups. The experiences of African American students and the effects of those experiences have brought forth the following results: “One African American student is suspended every seven seconds of the day” (Adams, 2008, p. 28). Students from other races or ethnicities are suspended at a much lower rate than those who are African American. The occurrence is hard to explain, but the disparity has been recognized by the public, political, and academic sectors. In a study conducted in a Florida school district, African Americans were four times as likely to be suspended as Asian students and twice as likely as their Caucasian or Hispanic counterparts (Arcia, 2007).

Thirty-four percent of African American students attend high poverty schools where three-fourths of this group qualify for free or reduced price lunches. Only 3% of Caucasian students attend high poverty schools (Adams, 2008). The problem is not in the percentage of African American students who attend these schools, but their gains or the lack of any gains if they do attend. High poverty schools are where many low-income and minority students experience inequities when it comes to having highly qualified teachers in their classrooms. The high minority schools have an even more difficult time than lower minority districts in retaining qualified teachers in the areas of math and science. The biggest recruitment obstacle is competition with other districts and it is intensified in high-poverty, high-minority, and urban districts (American Institutes for Research, 2007). In general, teacher quality is improving.

According to MacPherson (2003), 56% of teachers have a master's degree, compared with 23% 50 years ago. Today's teachers have an average of 15 years of full-time experience, and the highest percentage of teachers has at least 20 years of experience. Students attending public schools today are being taught by the most experienced teachers ever (MacPherson, 2003). In others words, good teachers are available, but hard to recruit in high poverty, high minority, and urban districts.

Demographically, 7% of teachers in the United States are African American, with the number of teachers who are African American males even lower at 1% (Adams, 2008). There is not a single teacher of color on staff in about 38% of public schools ("New Push for Teacher Diversity", 2005). The *1998 Digest of Educational Statistics* accounted for 2,561,294 teachers in the public school system with 108,744 of them being African American (Brown, 2010). During the elementary and secondary school years, a foundation is being laid for the child's sense of self, and this is why it is so crucial that kids see models of people like themselves in the school system. Male teachers are facing extinction in the classrooms of America; only 21% of the teaching workforce is male (a 40 year low) as documented by the National Education Association (MacPherson, 2003). The mass media presents illusions to the youth of this country, and having professionals in our school buildings counteract those illusions. African American, and/or male teachers would be knowledgeable of the culture of African American adolescents and to some extent could be more competent at regulating African American student behavior (Arcia, 2007).

The high school drop-out rate of African American students equates to 104 of every 1000. In fact, every school day approximately 7,000 African American students drop out. Across the nation, an estimated 71% of all students graduate from high school on time with a



regular diploma; however, barely half of African American and Hispanic students earn diplomas. Sixty-nine percent of all African American dropouts come from schools that have a high percentage of students who dropout, also known as dropout factories (Alliance for Excellent Education, 2007).

Tenth grade students were asked to pinpoint reasons for leaving school. Some of the school-related reasons were they had to get a job, they became pregnant or a parent, their friends dropped out, they were failing school, and they were suspended too often. The student-related reasons given were behavior/discipline problems, pregnancy, low ability level, and low self-esteem/self-efficacy. The family-related reasons were low SES, dysfunctional home life, no parental involvement, and ineffective parenting/abuse (Bridgeland, DiIulio, & Morison, 2006).

### **Underlying Educational Problems**

Various underlying problems exist that lead to students becoming at risk. One of many is how the school frequently ignores the at-risk student. Teachers have a strenuous time trying to discern and mind the viewpoint of at-risk learners. A negative impact also transpires through their teachers, who have unspoken biases. An abundance of teachers seem to have the inability or lack of willingness to reorganize the curriculum to simplify the social design. Students have social needs that are evenly considered to be of no importance to their education. Structuring policies, programs and classroom practices so that they can accommodate the idiosyncrasy of at-risk students is one of the major challenges facing educators today. Experiences and the background of at-risk students unfortunately leave them to be more vulnerable than other students (Donmoyer & Kos, 1993).

The job of a teacher has evolved from what was once mainly instruction to currently a position where teachers have to wear many hats throughout the course of the day. Along with

this, many demands are placed on teachers by their administration, which may deter them from focusing on instruction. Because of what the educational system has become, the structures may need to change. Some of the best structures may include families supporting the goal toward high performance. It insists upon the belief that it is the staff's responsibility to produce increased achievement, and the school receives support in terms of funding and the time from their districts, the kind of support that allows participation in best practices, professional learning communities, and professional development that is focused on middle grades achievement and improvement (Schools to Watch, 2010).

### **Resiliency**

Resiliency researchers have studied both students who drop out and those who are successful. The goal is to improve the dropout rate by identifying the variables that make a distinction between those who drop out and those who do not. Programs can then be deliberately designed to address these variables (Paik & Walberg, 2007).

There are several different descriptions of resilience that exist in the literature. However, there are two criteria researchers seem to agree upon: the occurrence of high risk or trauma, like experiencing violence, and the demonstration of adaptation through positive outcomes. For example, students may attend school regularly, adjust to their environment, and earn passing grades despite factors that categorize them as at-risk (Luthar, 2003). In order to reach those positive outcomes such as perseverance and graduation, students can thus benefit from a number of factors. An important external factor is the support they feel or received from parents, teachers, or other significant adults. The ability to face problems and to reach sound decisions (such as walking away from deviant peers) is the result of internal factors such as control, planning, self-esteem, and self-efficacy (Lessard et al., 2009).

A wide extent of personal, social, family and environmental factors that could lead to the consequences of successful transformation, despite challenging circumstance assist students in succeeding (Garmezy & Masten, 1991). Researchers have to acknowledge the elements that keep students successful. The environmental factors must be taken into consideration when assessing student success.

There is a wide extent of other factors, which could lead to developing a successful transformation. There are personal factors such as being in good health or being physically attractive. The social factor requires skills of adaptation to different environments. Family is also a factor; students need close ties with prosocial family members. Finally, there is the environmental factor; students who have normally functioning families are experiencing success.

A child who lacks behavior problems, does not participate in activity considered to be delinquent, and is engaged in school is a child who is resilient. Those who are non resilient are not engaged in school, participate in delinquent or risky behavior, have more than one behavior problem, or have been retained, suspended, excluded or expelled from school. Students who are socially compliant or obedient to authority are more resilient. These students usually give a description of relationships with their teachers that are positive. School is fun and easy as described by most resilient students. Resilient students can provide several examples of their favorite class subjects. Pro-social behaviors are relative to students experiencing positive emotional and social outcomes (Cove, Eiseman, & Popkin, 2005).

Cove, Eiseman, and Popkin's (2005) research focused on three groups of students from which contributors to resilient consequences were formed. When children can believe in their own self-worth, carry stress in an expert way, manage change, and have a repository of social problem-solving skills, they have been empowered by the aspects of individual psychology

(Cove et al., 2005). Adults can foster this in children by empowering them with the necessary skills to succeed academically and socially such as teaching conflict resolution and ways to adapt to various situations. Socioeconomic rank along with fluctuations in family, quality of relationships with teachers and other adults, entry to merit educational and recreational circumstances, parenting attribution, and being susceptible to trauma or violence fit into the category of social and economic factors that also contribute to resiliency (Werner & Smith, 1993).

**Resiliency models.** To analyze promising aspects related to resiliency, there are multiple models that anticipate the ways in which these contrasting aspects might benefit children. One of the major categories of these models is the *compensatory model*, which looks to recognize aspects that counteract the adverse aftermath of exposure to risk. This model does not combine with risk factors; instead it would rather have a direct and independent effect on the conclusion (Cove et al., 2005). For example, youth who are living in poverty are more likely to commit violent behavior than are youth not living in poverty; however, when adults are supervising behaviors, it may help to make up for the negative effects of poverty (Fergus & Zimmerman, 2005).

The *challenge model* treats those things that cause stress as possible enhancers for adaptation. Vindicated experiences, when handled successfully, cultivate the child's potentiality to deal with challenges in the future (Cove et al., 2005). For example, when a child is faced with threats from their peers and is able to handle the threat in a positive manner, this in turn develops the child's potential to deal with challenges in the future. Negative outcomes can be associated with both high and low levels of exposure to risk factors. However, positive outcomes can be

associated with low to moderate levels, because the exposure allows youth the opportunity to practice skills, which is an important point concerning this model.

Finally, the *protective factor model* tests how moderate agents calm the effect of being at risk on the anticipated outcome and transforms the child's reaction to exposure to the risk factors exposure. For instance, one study conceded that assertiveness in the child lowered the adverse effect of parental contention. This model occurs when, for example, youth who have high levels of parental support, have reduced exposure to violent behavior. This example demonstrates how parental support operates as a protective factor, lessening the negative impact (Fergus & Zimmerman, 2005). The *protective factor model* is in part a mixture of the compensatory and challenge models. Of the three, it is the most widely studied (Cove et al., 2005). Interventions are based on all three models; however the *challenge model* seems to be the most widely used.

All three of the aforementioned models of predictions of resiliency can be beneficial to teachers because they present external factors that are affecting students and may help teachers with engaging students. Engaging students, using the external factors, may require a focus on nonacademic skills such as developing the child's ability to deal with challenges or providing children with chances to practice skills that solve problems.

There are other researchers who have analyzed resiliency models as well. Furstenberg's (1993) research on adolescents growing up in poor communities suggests that when a strong relationship exists between a particular risk and a child, then the outcomes vary by the child's amount of exposure to that risk. If a child has a high level of risk to violence, the impact on the child is greater. Furstenberg's research supports the compensatory model. Even when students are living with high risk, their success is possible if the student has a family that is supportive (Furstenberg, Cook, Eccles, Elder, & Sameroff, 1999).

Psychological characteristics appear to be the first protection for students. Personal characteristics such as internal focus of control, development of a strong ego, diligence, positive beliefs, and self-worth protect them against stress. Researchers have found that family relationships contribute greatly in both risk and resilience. Parental engagement, warm family surroundings, and synergy with adults who are not family to predict adjustment and accomplishment, as well as the development of quality social relationships and strong social skills (Hair, Jager, & Garret, 2001). The research on resilient students exposes some factors that schools may address that may assist schools with engaging students.

### **Motivation**

Engaging and motivating students both work together. Multiple researchers who are concerned with academic motivation of students, especially those who concentrate on the changing of motivation within classroom settings, have begun to pay attention to the role of interpersonal variables in students' engagement. Students want to belong to their peer groups; they want to sense that they belong. The concept that individuals pursue social motives is not new (Ford, 1992). Since 1996, the education sphere of influence has seen an overwhelming intensification in research in the area of social perceptions being tied to academic motivation (Anderman & Kaplan, 2008).

**Social processes and motivation.** Noting various corresponding foci in the social domain is one way to distinguish the evolving make up of research on social processes and academic motivation. Another dominant focus is social relationships. The focal point of this research is on the role of interaction patterns, interpersonal relationships, and social perceptions as they relate to students' academic motivation. Researchers pay close attention to students' relationships with different partners when they explore the role of social relationships in

academic motivation. Teacher-student relationships have been paid a considerable amount of attention, while other researchers have made the choice to focus on students' relationships with their peers. A smaller number of studies have been conducted to examine students' relationships with their parents in association with motivational characteristics (Anderman & Kaplan, 2008).

When parents support and have high expectations of their children, this mainly operates as a motivator for pupils. Parents' assurance in their students' academic dexterities, child-rearing practices that support independence and warmth, support of particular achievement behaviors, and engagement in their students' education as well as classroom and school associated activities assist students informing positive self-ideas and academic motivation (Bong, 2008). Schools who engage parents are more likely to engage students as well.

In the social domain another major focus, which complements the main idea on social reasons and social connections, is students more general need for social approval, perceived belonging, and establishment with school (Baumeister & Leary, 1995). In research on academic ambition and social processes, it is important to focus on culture and cultural processes. The relations cannot be figured out exclusive of these two systems' cultural meaning (Anderman & Kaplan, 2008).

Providing a foundation for students who do not excel because they have insufficient motivation embraces removing comparisons and choosing rewards and tasks carefully, along with setting personal goals. Specifically, during adolescence students are sharply aware of and intensely engrossed in how their own accomplishment compares with that of others. School experiences, brought together with awareness, actualize the basics for students' motivational adaptation. The effectiveness of school wide efforts depends on strengthening motivation by

having knowledge of its progress and barriers as well as how staff members and parents can best gain access into the positive motivation of a student (Arcia, 2007).

The underlying reason for human behaviors is motivation. When a student fails to succeed, adults will repeatedly deplore that a student is “just not motivated”. The learned actions that students engage in are bypassing classroom tasks, missing homework, rushing through assignments, disturbing others, and the list continues. Teachers commonly give this explanation as the reason why students do not learn. These kinds of behavior do not represent an image that is absent of motivation, but instead motivation that is commanded by something other than the desire to be an academic success or obtain approval of the adults from adults in the system (Arcia, 2007).

Students are affected by those learned actions. This affects the beliefs students have about their relationships to the classroom; thus, it affects what influences achievement motivation. Students’ motivational adjustment in the classroom receives contributions from several internal and external factors including making grades that are comparable to their peers, having a sense of belonging to their peer groups, selecting assignments of suitable difficulty, identifying the association between effort and aptitude, and comprehending how the classroom may benefit them as a student. This area of research seems to single out behaviors that pertain to academics such as finishing assignments, classroom engagement, and so forth (Arcia, 2007).

**Components of achievement motivation.** In addition to the factors that affect students’ motivational adjustment in the classroom are components of achievement motivation, which includes social comparison, ability and effort, reward salience, task preference, and enhancing achievement motivation. With regard to social comparison, a positive motivational orientation would be represented by beliefs that personal growth and mastery are more significant than



comparing one's performance to others. Ideas of ability and effort are reciprocal. Some adolescents trust that ability can be improved by applying more effort, and others accept that ability is affixed, and no amount of effort will change it. Teachers can implement social comparison by having the student to track their own grades and teach students to use their own scores for motivation. A basis of successful adjustment is reward salience that reflects students' beliefs about classroom and school rewards. Schools typically set expectations for the student body, and with the expectations come rewards and consequences. Schools use rewards to motivate students to behave appropriately. Students over a varying period of time adjust to the expectation and typically work toward the reward. In regard to task preference, positive orientation is reflected by task choices that are to some degree demanding and offer the most potential for new learning. The probability that students will adopt positive motivational orientations can be increased with the teachers' help by devising schools and classrooms with attention to motivational construct (Klose, 2008). Teachers should design projects that allow for differentiated instruction that leads to task alternatives that in turn leads to the most potential for new learning. Schools have to become more innovative in finding ways to motivate students so that students are motivated to learn.

In an example given by Klose (2008), students' scores were compared on a chart that was posted in the classroom. Public comparison can be threatening and cue defensive reactions. Students may elect to detach from the tasks that are reflected on the chart if they feel that they do not meet perceived standards. If effort is not put forth by the student, a premise cannot be made about whether or not the student would have achieved. Students, who are not succeeding, according to the chart, receive a large deal of information that is not positive in regard to their performance, especially when they put forth effort and achieve the milestones that are

symbolized on a chart but never quite achieve to the degree of his or her classmates. Once a student has failed repeatedly, an awareness of his or her uselessness and low self-esteem further minimizes motivation for learning. Additionally, learning has to be captivating to students; it has to be the dominant activity of school. A student's energy is probably directed toward activities that are improper and may disturb others from learning (Klose, 2008).

Positive strategies for teachers, parents, and students can assist students with personal motivation. Environments that threaten positive motivation are an area where parents can help their students. By focusing on setting goals that are personal to the student for their achievement and focusing on what is important to their student, parents are teaching their child to be proactive and lessening any threat to their motivation. A strategy for teachers is to decrease the impact of social comparison. Emphasizing goal setting and individual progress monitoring in the classroom is a way for administrators to assist teachers. Lastly, another teacher strategy is to allow students to make choices about tasks that increase the connection for learning and mastery (Klose, 2008).

Competition is a characteristic of schools and every society. Competitive designs negatively alter self-concept, academic growth, and future motivation for learning. Students are forced to make sense of reasoning that shields their underlying sense of self-worth when they are obligated to contend in academic settings (Klose, 2008). The following are significant steps for building administrators to allow with their building staff when cultivating programs and policies to promote achievement motivation in their students. Promoting social comparison can be noticed by examining structures in the school. Rather than superiority over others, administrators should promise to initiate arrangements that promote ability and growth. Administrators could develop and advocate a climate that accounts for student's input, despite their academic

competence. Administrators should give priority to accomplishment and growth in visible features of the learning environment. Finally, students' progression should be included as part of teacher evaluations (Klose, 2008).

In addition, students who have confidence in the fact that they can successfully complete a task are more motivated and engaged (McMillan & Hearn, 2009). Cultivating absolute achievement motivation should not just be a means to an end, but it should be a central goal of education. A certain motivational adjustment can be nurtured by educators by focusing on attainment, growth, personal goals, and ability (Klose, 2008).

Lavoie (1999) identified six channels for motivation: praise, power, projects, prestige, prizes, and people. These are motivators that each person responds to differently, just like some people are kinesthetic and some are auditory learners. Many teachers fail many of their students because they try to motivate their students, with techniques that motivate them (Lavoie, 1999).

Students who find praise rewarding seem easy to motivate, but it is all in the approach. Praise is something that teachers can overdo—if you praise students too much, it can desensitize them and they will no longer respond to the praise. Students who are motivated by power can be oppositional and argumentative, so the trick is for teachers to give them power without giving up too much of their own. The child who loves projects enjoys the how of learning. A portion of each grade should be assigned to process so they are rewarded for hard work. Students who seek recognition will respond to awards and leadership opportunities, or prestige, but target them effectively. Prizes are part of a classroom reward system, but teachers should avoid excessive extrinsic motivation. Students will excel when allowed to work with others, so focus on cooperation not competition for those who are geared towards people motivators (Lavoie, 1999).

The dilemma with rewards is that though they may alter behavior, they do not alter (and may even debilitate) motivation. As a motivator, punishments are just as ineffective and inefficient. Teachers use competition to motivate students, all the same the only person who might be motivated by competition is the person who might win. Struggling students will not be motivated with a game that they will lose. Knowing what is occurring inside the brain is the first step to understanding motivation (Cleaver, 1999).

Students' brains pay attention to facts that are personally applicable. Students' brains are active when they are analytical and immersed with facts that are consequential or applicable to their lives. Students get a natural high from being successful, which happens after dopamine is released in the pleasure center of their brains. This is something teachers can take advantage of in the classroom by expressly pointing out how their students are progressing (Cleaver, 1999).

Many teachers complain that students are not learning because they are just not motivated. Motivation has to be taught all the time. Motivational knowledge is taught through the opportunities teachers provide, the relationships that teachers construct, and the strategies teachers illustrate. Students' mental outlook can be improved in the long run when teachers assist students with understanding why they are learning (Cleaver, 1999).

### **Engagement**

Students, parents, and the education industry should commit to the education of all students. Supportive parents, a committed educational industry, and students who are committed to their own education can play a crucial part in increasing student achievement and decreasing the dropout rate. Peer systems also play a role in student achievement. Peers or friends are very important to adolescents and they have influence over one another. Parents, peers, students, and

the education industry's engagement in education are likely to increase student academic success.

**Student engagement.** The literature on each of these indicators will be reviewed, and other research studies examining interventions for at-risk students will be discussed. The first indicator is student engagement. Student engagement is critical because engaged students are more likely to have higher achievement. Student engagement, in this study, generally refers to the extracurricular activities that a student participates in and attends. This study addresses an intervention that is used predominantly with African American students. African American students with low SES tend to participate less in extracurricular activities (National Center for Education Statistics, (NCES), 1995). Because of this, some of the focus of student engagement covers how to engage African American students, with the goal of decreasing the drop-out rate. Other areas that affect student engagement are discussed, and an explanation of “the problem” of engaging at-risk students broadens the perspective. Resiliency and motivation are two key components for at-risk students, which if understood better by educators may, increase engagement among students who are considered to be at-risk.

What students retain and what they learn is associated with student engagement (Center for Community College Student Engagement, 2010). Educators believe that engagement with the school attracts students, ties them to school, makes them part of the community, and motivates them to succeed in their academic careers (Deneen, 2010). Students who are more engaged in the classroom are also those who are involved in extracurricular activities (Heller, Calderon, & Medrich, 2003). Much is to be gained from students who are participating in extracurricular activities. These students benefit socially, physically, and in the area of

emotional growth when they participate in sports, clubs, or other activities (Fredericks & Eccles, 2006).

With the number of students from low-income families increasing, student engagement in the classroom is especially significant as it relates to participation in extracurricular activities (Fredricks & Eccles, 2006). These activities afford students a chance to expand their positive support system among adult staff and their peers (Heller, Calderon, & Medrich, 2003). Music, academic clubs, and sports are types of extracurricular activities that are found in almost every high school (NCES, 1995). These activities provide opportunities for students to learn individual and group responsibility, competition, the value of teamwork, a sense of culture and community, physical strength, and endurance. A channel is provided through extracurricular activities to use a real-world context to apply academic skills and leadership and is thus considered part of a well rounded education. Some research suggests a decrease in the likelihood of dropping out and school failure when students participate in extracurricular activities. Additionally, the same participation increases the likelihood of students' sense of engagement or attachment to their school (NCES, 1995).

Studies have shown that achievement and school engagement are associated with students being involved in extracurricular activities, typically non-academic afterschool extracurricular activities (Cosden, Morrison, Gutierrez, Brown, 2004). Instead of taking the attention from students meeting their academic goals, research studies have found that students who are involved in extracurricular activities such as art, sports, and service clubs are more likely to have high academic achievement and less likely to become a high school drop-out (Cosden et al., 2004).

Students who are average achievers do not benefit as much as those students who are at risk for school failure when they participate in extracurricular activities. Extracurricular activities have an impact on achievement by assisting in constructing student strengths and increasing connectedness to the school, which increases self-esteem and certain social networks. Students who focus on high interest activities instead of on their deficits are afforded a way into conventional social networks. The passage is provided through the enhancement and maintenance of positive characteristics that make the school connection very strong (Cosden et al., 2004).

According to Holloway, most of the research on extracurricular participation correlates with positive student attendance and achievement. Positive effects are especially crucial for students who are a part of ethnic minorities, students with disabilities, and students at risk of dropping out of high school. He also stated that research shows the need for school activity participation, especially athletics, because athletics directs students to an enhanced status among peers and to higher self-esteem (as cited in Brown, 2000).

Participation has its benefits. In 1992, the NCES found that extracurricular participation had a positive association with success indicators among public high school seniors. Student success is related to extracurricular activities in school. Some of the indicators of successful participation in school include academic achievement, consistent attendance, and aspirations for continuing education beyond high school (NCES, 1995).

Similarly in 2008, the University of California Riverside conducted a study on high school dropouts. One of their discoveries was that dropout rates are directly connected to how engaged students are with clubs, sports, and after-school activities. The results of the study showed that extracurricular activities were also the kind of programs that would be first to go

when state budget cuts are made, but these are the programs that may well be what keeps students in school (“Extra curricular activities,” 2008).

Forming friendships is a student engagement behavior that helps in attaining an education. Engaged students also are less likely to become emotionally affected by the social and behavioral persuasions of others who drop out of school. Students who are disengaged are highly likely to associate themselves with friends who have dropped out of school. Associations with dropout friends increase student chances of not completing high school, according to various studies (“Extra Curricular Activities May Be the Glue that Keeps Students in School”, 2008).

**Challenges of increasing student engagement.** Achievement is the ultimate goal. If students are achieving, they are less likely to drop out of school. Factors may vary from school to school. Each school should identify factors that affect their schools with the determination to increase student engagement, both in and out of the classroom, which leads to student achievement. One thing that schools need to achieve is their ultimate goal—funding. Without funding, it is challenging to produce programs that aid in increasing student achievement. The intention of educational institutions in a just society is to improve the position of these students in the acquisition of basic rights and duties (Rawls, 1993).

Improvement means that institutions have advantaged students. Personal benefits are slow to come to those who have been disadvantaged within their lifetime and to those who identify with groups who have been disadvantaged historically over generations. Although access to education and its benefits, such as economic and social mobility, appears to be part of both the distribution and gaining of advantage, specific student populations do not gain as much as others through this advantaging (Levin, 2008). For example, those students who do not gain



are more likely to attend schools where their instructional needs are not met; therefore, the opportunities for academic achievement decline and students' fullest potential is not reached. Engagement of all students is advantageous to the entire country. Engaged students are likely to be engaged in learning and ultimately are capable of making a positive contribution to society.

Youth occupy the majority of their waking hours in school; hence, their school experiences may perform an essential link to their performance. Social institutions are certainly how schools have been judged (Paik & Walberg, 2007). Within this institution, 15 million kids are retained every year. Failure then becomes the child's problem, as is the responsibility for learning. Failed students rarely recover (Page, 2009). Early intervention is crucial, and some of the indicators can be determined as early as at the middle school level. Middle school students who are at risk are failing at least one course, have been suspended, and fail to attend school. Eventually, this group of at-risk students becomes disengaged, and their actions lead to them dropping out of school.

At-risk students probably present the greatest challenge when it comes to student engagement. At-risk students are placed in this category by different circumstances. Those who create the policies on education have surmised a definition of at-risk students. However, it is expressed by concluding what a particular group of students is missing. The formation of thought is initiated with a fictitious ideal and scrutinizes individual people only insofar as they do not meet the ideal (Donmoyer & Kos, 1993). Schools should instead use research to help build upon the skills that already exist with this group of students, seek out innovative ways to meet the instructional needs of these students, and provide more professional development for teachers who instruct at-risk students.

**Student engagement among African American students.** Student engagement is essential for all students. This study investigated an all African American population, and so the literature review will address concerns of the African American student population. The following are some needs of African American students that, if addressed, may help to prevent this ethnic group from dropping out in such large proportions.

African American students desire to have the best instruction that teachers are able to contribute: there is a need to have relationships with their teachers that bring about a mutual respect and are built on trust. In addition, African American students need a teacher with an attitude that demonstrates the belief that all African American students arrive at school with an innate talent and gift (Carter, 2000). When instructional needs as well as other needs are being met, then African American students may be led to engage in other ways, too.

Another need is for teachers who provide African American students with the academic skills of reading, writing, and math skills that are essential for academic success. African American students want teachers who are willing to reveal to them personal empowerment that is gained through the use of their education. A teacher can apparently advance African American student achievement by programming the message that personal empowerment comes from a good education (Carter, 2000). Students need to connect with their school by connecting with their teachers. A good education is obtained when students have engaged with the teacher and school.

African American students want teachers who create a curriculum that is culturally relevant. Cultivating student achievement occurs when instruction is culturally relevant. Students engage more with material that celebrates and recognizes their culture. Teaching is impossible when the students lack control in the classroom; therefore, a direct link to student

success is obviously classroom management. If it is guaranteed that classroom management skills are in good use, then the ability for African American students to succeed and reach their maximum potential is increased. The focus of the classroom must be instructional (Carter, 2000). Behavior issues often lead to suspensions and dropouts.

Effective classroom management should be fair; and teachers must have a positive attitude about African American students. Otherwise a self-fulfilling prophecy may be manifested. All students display some of the same behaviors. If other students are not being punished for their behaviors, then in all fairness, neither should African American students.

Teachers must also be consistently accurate. Parents and students should both receive an explanation of the classroom rules at the beginning of the school year from a teacher, whose desire is to avoid any misinterpretation. A great curriculum should go along with instruction that is above satisfactory. The focus in the classroom should not be on discipline, but on instruction. Students need effective instruction and a good curriculum; they need firmness rather than meanness. Students learn at different rates, so a fair amount of patience is needed from the teacher for these students who are struggling with the subject matter and require more time (Carter, 2000). These students may need more than a regular school day, which is the whole point of Saturday Academy.

African American students need their mindsets to be developed by their teacher to become college bound. A second rate education is brought forth from low expectations. This in turn fails to prepare African American students for college readiness. A mindset has to be a necessity for all teachers that leads to the following self-talk: all students can learn, all students are worthy of a college education and I don't get to decide who may and may not go (Carter, 2000).

In 2009, 8.1% of the nation's students will drop out of high school, while 70.1% will graduate and go on to a two or four year college. College attendance is increasing in percentages even for African Americans. Between 2000 and 2008 the percentage of college students who were African American rose from 11.3% to 13.5%. This increase reflects growing numbers of college-age African Americans (NCES, 2010).

Lastly, when a culture of high expectations is put in place that filters through the whole school, the school becomes an endorsement of a high performing school in which leaders and teachers have set the tone. As Carter (2000) stated, "College is the goal at great schools" (p. 9). African American students need teachers who focus on those variables that can be altered. Therefore, an educator has to be compelled to change their focus from those things that they do not have control over to those things that they do (Carter, 2000). Research provides information that details the needs of African American students. This research can also be used to engage African American students and deter the large proportions that are dropping out.

**Parental engagement.** Currently, a popular topic in education is parental involvement; this may be due to the declining family stability over the last four decades. Many studies have been conducted that indicate the beneficial impact of parental involvement. According to research, students do their homework, have low absentee rates, and improve their language skills when their parents are involved (Jeynes, 2005). Overall, students are more engaged when their parents are involved.

Regardless of a child's SES or race, studies have shown a direct correlation between parental involvement and a child's academic achievement. There is plenty of research that makes a direct connection between parental involvement and student success. Educators and professionals today agree that there must be a partnership between the parents and school.

Parent participation can only increase a student's ability to succeed. Increased participation from parents can only enhance a child's ability to succeed (Alldred & Edwards, 2000). Studies show a direct correlation between parental involvement and a child's academic achievement, regardless of their SES or race (Alldred & Edwards, 2000).

Parents have a tendency to become less involved in their child's education when their child reaches middle school. However, parental involvement in a child's education from ages 10-14 is just as important for a child's success in school as it is in the earlier grades ("Parent Involvement at the Middle School Level", 2010). Parental involvement can be defined in several different ways, but one definition that is applicable to this study is as follows: parents who support school efforts through learning materials at home. These parents also stay actively engaged by staying informed of their child's progress in school. It is important for parents to validate that school success is attainable along with displaying a positive attitude regarding education ("Parent Involvement at the Middle School Level", 2010).

If middle school parents become involved, it profits both the child and the school. As a result, grades and test scores are higher; behavior and students' attitudes are more positive; there are successful academic programs; and as a whole, the schools are more effective ("Parent Involvement at the Middle School Level", 2010). The way that parents were once involved with their student in elementary school varies greatly once their child enters middle school. Positive involvement for a middle school parent may entail getting to know several teachers, opposed to just one, staying in touch with the school counselor because they keep parents informed in terms of behavior and progress, staying abreast of school policies and curriculum, reviewing student's record each year, staying informed about student's test results and grades,

and answering any correspondence that as a parent may receive from the school (“Parent Involvement at the Middle School Level”, 2010).

The University of New Hampshire conducted research demonstrating that when parents are actively involved in their students’ education, students do much better in school (University of New Hampshire, 2008). Data from parents, teachers, school administrators and more than 10,000 eighth-grade students in both public and private schools was used by researchers Conway and her colleague Houtenville. They found that parental involvement has a strong, positive effect on student achievement. Parental involvement is a beyond or after school factor that correlates with achievement. In regard to achieving the same results, they found that parental involvement is equivalent to spending more than \$1,000 per pupil per year. The advantages of parental involvement undoubtedly outweigh the financial cost per pupil to achieve the same results (University of New Hampshire, 2008).

The research on the critical role of parental involvement in a child’s education supports the following nine conclusions. One, academic performance is improved by parental involvement. The positive influence on academic achievement is greater when parents are more intensely drawn into their child’s education. Two, better classroom behavior follows parental involvement. Classroom conduct, absenteeism, motivation, and the child’s attitude toward school can all be altered by a parent’s regard and support. Three, involvement extends from preschool through high school. A parent’s involvement can make a difference at all age levels. Four, training helps parents of disadvantaged students get involved. Parents of minority or low-income students have the potential to be just as effective as other parents when they receive adequate training and support. Five, reading skills are improved immensely when parents read together with their child at home. An important contribution to a child’s reading ability is a

parent reading aloud with them. Six, parental involvement can be encouraged by schools in a number of ways. Once schools seriously look for ways to get parents involved and provide training programs to teach parents how to get involved in their students' education, meaningful parental involvement is most likely to develop. Seven, teacher morale is lifted by parental involvement. Once parents get connected, they gain a greater awareness of the daily struggles teachers face in the classroom, which can lead to empathy and compassion. Therefore, teachers and schools gain from parental involvement, and teacher morale is improved. Eight, students and parents benefit from parental involvement. Parents receive the enjoyment of lending a helping hand to their students' education and future. There are some studies that show that a parent's partnership in their child's education may stimulate the parent to further his or her own education. Nine, the greatest barrier to parental involvement is time constraints. Finding ways to work around parents' schedules and freeing up time for teachers to meet with parents are two effective solutions to reinforce parental involvement (Chen, 2008). Therefore, any intervention program for at-risk students must involve parents if it is to be successful.

**Peer engagement.** One of the last engagement indicators is peer engagement. The highest point of peer influences is during adolescence. Peer relations change throughout the course of childhood, but they exist as an essential source of influence from the entrance of school through adolescence (Henry, 2000). Peers develop fresh qualities of mutual exchange and intimacy during the middle school years (Farrell & Erwin, 2008).

Students are typically exposed to peer relationships when they enter into first grade, and are closely supervised by responsible adults. As time progresses students have more unsupervised interactions in which they must learn how to cope with aggressiveness in others, learn strategies for entering into groups, and solve problems that may come up in their

relationships with peers (Henry, 2000). According to this, the formative period for peer relations is during the early grades. This is the time when students learn the necessary skills to relate to their peers, and others either accept or reject them (Henry, 2000).

The formation of identifiable peer groups begins in middle school. Peer groups become more cliquish and selective as students in middle school move toward adolescence. The number of children who are isolated from friendship groups increases. Many studies have disclosed relationships between peer rejection and antisocial behavior. Students who lack self-regulation skills are likely to be rejected by their peers. Therefore, peer rejection leads to more undesirable behaviors (Henry, 2000).

Students form peer groups in a number of ways. Academics are not usually how students form friendship groups, instead they are formed based on aggression and attractiveness. One study found male students between the ages of 10 and 13 years grouped together by levels of aggression. Male students are more likely to be at risk.

An essential cause of risk for school failure, delinquency, and drug use emerges from the family and peer systems among urban students. Youth from the most impoverished functioning families were at increased risk for chronic minor offenses and those offenses that progress from minor to major offenses, such as progressing from stealing candy from a gas station to stealing cars (Henry, 2000). Central to the study of delinquency are peer relations. Much importance is placed on friends by adolescents. They spend much of their time with their peers and are strongly influenced by peers more than any other time in their life, especially if they are unsupervised because their parent or caregiver is working (Henry, 2000).

The impact that peers have on one another during adolescence is notable. There is a need to learn from peer interactions and build upon the peer mentoring, peer tutoring, and peer



mediation groups that schools use with at-risk students as interventions. Parents, educators, and lawmakers have to do all that can be done to ensure academic success for all students. Peer engagement was more difficult to study; therefore, there is less research on this particular topic.

### **Educational Industry Engagement: Instructional Reforms**

Lawmakers have also recognized the essentialness of parental involvement. Beginning with Nation at Risk leading up to the current instructional reform, lawmakers have attempted to mandate some form of parental involvement. The following details what lawmakers implemented into the instructional reforms regarding parental involvement.

Instructional reforms began with A Nation at Risk, and Goals 2000 followed. Goals 2000 stated every school will promote partnerships that will increase parental involvement and, in addition, participation in promoting the social, emotional, and academic growth of students (U.S. Department of Education, 1994). Eventually, Goals 2000 evolved into NCLB. The NCLB Act acknowledges parents over 300 times. The NCLB Act goes as far as to define parental involvement in different parts of the Act (National Coalition for Parental Involvement in Education, 2004).

**NCLB.** The reforms from the 1980s had excellent processes, but they were considered top-down, whereas school restructuring claims to be bottom up. President George W. Bush recognized that too many of the United States neediest students were being left behind, and he signed a law on January 8, 2002 called NCLB. This act was built on four pillars: using scientific research to do what works, accountability for results, expanded parental options, and increasing local control and flexibility (U.S. Department of Education, 2003).

Under expanded parental options, parents are provided with more information about their child's progress. Under NCLB each state must measure every public school student's progress

in reading and math in each of Grades 3 through 8 and at least once during Grades 10 through 12. The NCLB Act requires that parents are alerted to important information on the performance of their child's school. The NCLB Act requires states and school districts to give parents easy to read, detailed report cards on schools districts, telling them which ones are succeeding and why. It gives parents whose students attend schools in need of improvement new options. In the first year that a school is considered to be in need of improvement, parents receive the option to transfer their child to a higher-performing public school, including a charter school, in the district (U.S. Department of Education, 2003).

The NCLB Act puts a special emphasis on implementing education programs and practices that have been clearly demonstrated to be effective through rigorous scientific research, focusing on what works. It supports learning in the early years, thereby preventing many learning difficulties that may arise later (U.S. Department of Education, 2003).

The major core of NCLB has grown out of concern regarding education of students who are looked upon as least likely to be successful in school. NCLB is designed to address the educational needs of students who struggle the most in school. Terms used for those students include "at-risk," "disadvantaged," "struggling," "deprived educationally," or what has also been referred to as "underprepared educationally." These students come mostly from low socioeconomic families and from minority linguistic and ethnic backgrounds. For example, the dropout rates in 1999 were 25.3% for Hispanic, 13.4% for Black, and 7.6% for White students, and these figures only demonstrate those who are documented as dropouts (Johannessen, 2004).

The NCLB Act set the goal of having every child perform proficiently on state-defined education standards by the end of 2013-2014 school years. To reach that goal, every state has developed benchmarks to measure progress and make sure every child is learning. States are

required to separate (or disaggregate) student achievement data, holding schools accountable for subgroups, so that no child falls through the cracks. A school or district that does not meet the state's definition of "adequate yearly progress" (AYP) for two straight years is considered to be "in need of improvement" (U.S. Department of Education, 2003).

The focus of the most recent at-risk reforms is on preventing the expected failure of students. The circles of policy makers connect the goals of school restructuring or site based decision making with the need to serve at-risk students (Donmoyer & Kos, 1993). Site based management puts decision making in the hands of those who clearly know students best. It is admired as a way to make schools more responsible for the needs of particular at-risk students (Donmoyer & Kos, 1993).

The belief is that if control is maintained locally over the instructional approaches, teachers' responsibilities, and school curriculum, the success rate of public schools with students who are currently failing will increase. There is optimism about school restructuring programs for so-called at-risk students. At-risk policies focus upon the economic advantages of integrating more citizens into the workforce. Reformers regularly pay honor to the ability to "pursue a satisfying life, reap the benefits of economic prosperity, and partake of the privileges and responsibilities of citizenship that is the American Dream" (Donmoyer & Kos, 1993, p. 269).

**Race to the Top.** Introducing high standards, common standards, and enabling students to meet them; partnering with our teachers to achieve excellence in the classroom; educating students, all of them, to graduate from college ready for a career, and ready to make the most of their lives is all part of President Barack Obama's education reform (Obama, 2010). In one of President Obama's many speeches on education, he stated that preparing students to compete in this global economy is one of the most challenging, yet urgent, issues that America is facing. He

also stated that it is time to start holding administrators, teachers, the community, students, and parents accountable. In order to ensure that the next generation of students is leaders in achievement and creativity in this world, the United States has to prepare students to be successful in college and in the workforce (Organizing for America, 2010).

Obama's reform plans to solve the current situation focus on three areas. First, America has to improve K-12 schooling. Obama's reform supports schools that need improvement instead of punishing those schools as NCLB did. An additional improvement is recruiting new teachers and cultivating inventive ways to reward teachers who are doing a great job. The reformation of NCLB will be so that support for schools that need improvement will exist instead of a punishment. The next area is to expand access to higher education. All American students should be made ready to attend at least one year of higher education or job training after graduating from high school to better prepare the workforce for the 21st century economy. By extending Pell grants and introducing new tax credits, the government hopes to continue to make higher education more affordable, to make sure any young person who is a hard worker and who longs for a college education can achieve it. The last area is to make sure the students in the United States are prepared for kindergarten. Influencing learning is critical in a child's life during the time before he or she reaches kindergarten. By dramatically expanding Head Start and other programs, the United States government will invest in early childhood education. This will make sure that all children are ready to enter kindergarten (Organizing for America, 2010).

Obama expressed his concerns about how Americans have acknowledged that education is a prerequisite for prosperity. However, Americans have merely been sustaining the status quo, thus falling behind other nations. "America was once number one in college completion and now we are number twelve, within a single generation," stated President Obama during a speech

at the 2010 National Urban League Convention. Simultaneously, 10 other nations in science and math leave eighth graders trailing behind. Meanwhile, African American students badly trail their white counterparts here at home and lag behind almost every other developed nation abroad. An income gap between white and black and between poor and rich is continuously widening by the achievement gap (Obama, 2010).

In a speech at the National Urban League Centennial Conference, Obama expressed his belief that America's citizens are obligated to elevate every child in every school in this country, especially those who are starting out furthest behind. He stated that his administration is making a commitment to excellence in American education. College degrees have to be within reach for anyone who wants them, although they are more expensive to obtain, because a higher education has never been so crucial (Obama, 2010).

Under President Obama's newest education reform, there is an outline to increase parental involvement. Obama is convinced that parents have a responsibility to ensure that their students are on time and ready to learn every day. Every school's educators and parents should agree upon clear and high expectations for student behaviors. An establishment of a school-family contract that lays out expectations for student attendance, homework, and behavior is encouraged by the Obama plan. The President will call on parents to make sure homework is completed, to turn off the video games and TV, and to invest in their child's education both in and outside of school. Lastly, community service is expected of all students who are in grant recipient districts (Organizing for America, 2010).

### **Factors That Influence Student Achievement**

Barton (2004) analyzed 14 factors that were found to influence achievement. Eight of the 14 factors are labeled as "before and beyond school": (a) being read to by a parent or caretaker,

(b) student mobility, (c) lead poisoning, (d) the amount of time students spend watching television, (e) parent participation in their students' education, (f) birth weight, (g) parent availability, and (h) hunger and malnutrition. The other six factors are labeled "in school factors." These factors include (a) class size, (b) teacher experience and attendance, (c) school safety, (d) the rigor of curriculum, (e) technology assisted instruction, and (f) teacher preparation. Because of a limitless number of times that African American students are misrepresented, those who are living in poverty in the United States, are more apt than students from higher socioeconomic backgrounds to encounter those negative "before and beyond school" factors, which genuinely may overwhelm many teachers. Even though this research has been provided, other research has steadily proven that a good curriculum, the quality of instruction, and the happenings in the classroom are more crucial causes of student success than other factors. Factors such as school safety, class size, and hiring certified and accomplished instructors are elements that are controlled by school leaders. The austerity of the curriculum and the teacher's ability to convey lesson plans are within each teacher's control (Barton, 2004). There are many factors that directly affect student engagement. It does not matter what factors educators decide to focus on. There is an essential need to consider any factor that may affect student engagement.

### **Intervention**

According to Harvest (2008), nearly 20% of American students live in poverty, and these students do not achieve as their counterparts who are more affluent do. Principals play a large part in succeeding with struggling learners. School climate change and celebrating every child's success are two factors that will assist in helping struggling learners. A multitude of obstacles face students who come from low-income homes as they struggle to achieve academic success.

Even so, it is possible for these students to achieve success. A strategy to help them is as simple as making students aware that they can succeed (Harvest, 2008). Educators should provide struggling learners with strategies to help them to succeed.

In comparison, Cheung (2009) said students who are struggling in urban secondary classrooms need committed teachers who are knowledgeable in order to succeed academically. Teachers who have a vision for productive teaching and learning and are insistent and unrelenting are what these students need. Cheung (2009) studied the matter of cultivating commitment among struggling students. Leadership training should specifically focus on how to successfully address the nature of working with struggling students along with giving support through high expectations; when leaders have high teaching expectations that incorporate rigor over academics, support for struggling students is part of the results. Another result is teacher hiring and induction. Teachers who lack certification in core subjects and who did not major in them in college are teaching more than a quarter of high school students (Cheung, 2009). The last of the results is the necessity for making organizational changes such as developing a teacher community that is focused on holding up struggling students and nurturing commitment in urban high schools. Developing relationships between teachers and students may lead to reconfiguring schools. By shifting the current practices around these three practices, leaders maintain committed teachers and decrease teacher burnout (Cheung, 2009).

The last perspective comes from the well-known researcher Payne (2008) who has actualized nine strategies that help raise the achievement of students living in poverty. Payne found that learning happens one way in school, a way that conflicts with rules about how to behave, gain knowledge, and how to speak with students from families with little formal

education. Therefore, students who are living in poverty may be challenged by formal schooling. The nine strategies are as follows:

- One intervention that was particularly helpful in raising achievement for low-income students are building relationships of respect. Significant learning will not happen without a significant relationship
- Making beginning learning relational introduces new ideas through cooperative groups and paired assignments, whenever it is possible
- Students should be taught to speak in formal register because students who come from families without much formal education tend to default to the casual registers, the communication that is usually shared with friends
- The fourth intervention is to assess each student's resources. Several ways in which poverty and wealth are defined are in terms of the degree to which we have access to the following eight resources: emotional, support systems, role models and relationships, mental, spiritual, knowledge of unspoken rules, physical, and financial
- The fifth intervention is to teach the hidden rules of school. In order to thrive, people need to be made aware of the different rules and behaviors that exist in different environments. For example, there is a distinction between the rules in school and the rules out of school
- Intervention six is to monitor progress and plan interventions. It is imperative that a school wide process be put in place to monitor and intervene with at-risk kids
- The seventh intervention is to translate the concrete into the abstract. It is helpful when teachers can give students mental models—stories, visual representations, and analogies help them to become at ease with the intangible demonstrations



- Eighth, teach students how to ask questions. If a student knows how to ask a question, it gives way to a huge payoff in academic success. In order to acquire admission to information, questions are most important
- The last of the nine interventions is to forge relationships with parents. It is important to develop a welcoming climate at school for parents. Continuing to exist with daily life is overwhelming for many low-income parents, so that they cannot devote time to their students' schooling. Even when time is available, the parent may not know how to support the child's learning. (Payne, 2008, pp. 48-52)

Structuring unyielding relationships amid communities and schools also can be essential in supplying support for African American students. Some programs that showed the greatest gains for minority youth students include accountability, leadership, and quality implementation; a curriculum that is academically demanding; involved families; supports for students that are exclusive; and involvement in the community. The following actions improve minority achievement and concentrate on enhanced academic success and results for every student. States and localities should offer the essential foundations to make sure students succeed and begin early (Payne, 2008). A large number of interventions are being developed, implemented, and used all over the country. Payne (2008), Cheung (2009), and Harvest (2008) all provided comprehensive instructional strategies. Now, a description of some noteworthy interventions at the school level will be detailed.

A major risk factor for dropping out of school is suspension. In one Miami school district, the superintendent put together a committee to learn the contracts that were already in place with students who were suspended repeatedly and propose new ways of assisting students with staying in school as an intervention. Outreach fairs were held to offer students who were

taken out of school a way to finish their education. Schools should categorize at-risk students early, place students on improvement plans, and make intervention program series available (Bailey, 2007). The at-risk profile within this school district during the last school year consisted of 20,000 students. The implicated students who fit the profile were those students who were not applying themselves academically, received several suspensions, or were constantly truant. More than 1,350 students in high school and middle school were found to meet these criteria the first few weeks of school. By the time November had come around, the superintendent had banned the practice of suspending students and began implementing an intervention (Bailey, 2007).

An intervention called the *Comprehensive Alternative Reform Educational (CARE)* program took place in Commerce Middle School and operated late in the day. Three hundred students who were not meeting credit requirements were taken from the district's high schools. Within a time frame that is similar with peers, students are earning high school diplomas. They do this by remediating and accelerating their academic standing. That differentiation—aiming at those students who would be dropouts and supporting them so that they can reach up to where their peers are and return to the classroom—is significant (Charkes, 2008).

At the start of the next school year, four-year plans will be instituted for all incoming ninth graders with the ambition to be familiar with factors that could keep a student from graduating. To help triage the concerns and get these students caught up and on track, the Southern Westchester educational services board was instituting a program to focus on ninth graders. A training instruction program and an alternative high school for those students who have not been successful in a traditional high school setting will be set up. The principal also stated that the school's success could be contributed to a philosophy of "one size does not fit all"

as well as a setting in which rules covering everything from their clothing to their attendance are rigorously enforced. Restrictions have been placed on cell phones, electronics, and hats; and, a weapons search is done on everyone entering the building. Attendance is mandatory. Five students became pregnant in the school's two years of operation, and they were told by their principal to bring their babies to school if they could not find babysitters, which they did (Charkes, 2008).

The principal expressed that when students are on the verge of failing, an uncompromising approach is important. These students were categorized as potential dropouts, but CARE has an 85% success rate in graduating students. Students need help, and the educators at CARE decided to reach in and pull hard because the potential is there in those students (Charkes, 2008).

Another intervention that focuses on girls solely is The *Get Real* mentoring program and consists of 139 at-risk middle school girls ages 11-14 in the Miami Dade and Monroe Counties of Florida. This initiative is in collaboration between the Girl Scouts and students from Florida International University. The girls take field trips where they gain access to women actively involved in the legal, medical, and science fields. They receive instruction about abstinence, stereotyping, conflict resolution, and self-esteem. They also keep journals and do role playing exercises. The *Baby Think It Over* program that equips girls with realistic, computerized baby dolls they have to take care of for a weekend is the most popular activity (Bailey, 2007).

The next intervention uses mentors to help students to become successful. *Take Stock in Children* is another intervention that has been implemented in the state of Florida since 1995. *Take Stock in Children* was created to assist at-risk and low income students to become educated and avoid the cycle of poverty. *Take Stock in Children* offers mentors who care, college

scholarships, and encouragement for a better life. Generally, the services start in middle school, continue through high school and include their transition into college. The main principle of *Take Stock in Children* is that giving extensive support, accountability and motivation will cause students to work hard and make sure that they will graduate from high school and acquire a college degree (Take Stock in Children, 2009).

The next intervention is *Upward Bound*, a national college preparation program. The *Upward Bound* program serves high school students from low income families and high school students who come from families in which neither parent holds a bachelor's degree. *Upward Bound* supplies students with essential support while those students get ready for entrance into college. *Upward Bound's* goal is to raise graduation rates and then support students to enroll in and graduate from postsecondary education institutions ("Upward Bound Program", 2010). *Upward Bound* is an intervention that is connected to schools all over the United States.

*Target Hope* aims to reach secondary students who are at risk of failure. Across the country are several programs that assist Washington University in St. Louis, Missouri to find the most talented students from all neighborhoods and backgrounds, and *Target Hope* is one of those programs. *Target Hope* was founded in 1994 by Euclid Williamson. The target groups are secondary students in Chicago, Illinois. The mission of *Target Hope* has three goals: (a) to ensure high school graduation, (b) to advance retention in college after admission, and (c) to help bring about graduation and professional school preparation. The strategy of Williamson was to focus on positive solutions, composing safety nets and support systems (Skwiot, 2010).

An intervention called *Learn and Serve* is a community based service program which is multifaceted and designed to make academic achievement better, cultivate civic citizenship, and skills in leadership, and decrease dropout rates of at-risk minority students. The program

includes a 10-week educational enrichment program and an after-school program. *Learn and Serve* provides a sensible approach to improving academic achievement, leadership, and civic responsibility by concentrating on developing a stronger sense of social responsibility in at-risk youth (“Programs”, 2004).

The mayor of New York City’s effort to end the routine of promoting failing students is known as Saturday Academy (the same name as this study’s intervention). The proposition is to apply more rigorous promotion standards to fifth graders. A similar policy for third graders has also been adopted by the mayor despite the protests of experts and parents (Hu, 2004).

The New York City Saturday Academy consists of small classes taught at 118 elementary schools. The academy stretches over the holidays and winter break, being held on 24 Saturdays. School leaders invited 15,000 fifth graders to participate in Saturday Academy. Twelve thousand enrolled, even though they were not all attending the classes consistently. The mayor stated that school officials and parents were still making an attempt to encourage families with struggling fifth graders to send them to classes. Five new centers outside of schools support enrichment and instruction programs and house 60 students who have been suspended for up to 90 days (Hu, 2004).

In comparison, there are a few other interventions that share the name of Saturday Academy that are used as an intervention like the one in this study. They all wear the same title, and their missions are similar, but the programs vary. The School District of Osceola County has a Saturday Success Academy created to reduce ninth grade retentions. In July 2008, the school district received a grant that was offered for a three year support project for the purpose of improving ninth grade success. The long term intent ultimately is to improve graduation rates (MacGregor, 2009).

Part of the uniqueness of the Osceola County intervention is that this project provides for five additional counselors to work with at-risk eighth and ninth grade students. The majority of the time was spent with the eighth graders during the first year. The second and third year was spent with both eighth and ninth graders. Saturday Success Academy was held at four area sites, and the following activities were offered: current grades and assignments were checked by all students and their parents; current high school students provided a tour for students and their parents; current high school teachers offered academic enrichment activities; all of the sites explained elective offerings in detail (only one of the sites required students to rotate through every technical offering); and all schools provided orientations to club offerings, athletics, and performing arts. After completing the Saturday Success Academy, several of the ninth grade participants stated that they realize now how important academic success was in their freshman year (MacGregor, 2009).

The University of Southern California has a Neighborhood Academic Initiative (NAI) entitled the Middle School Saturday Academy. The NAI is a general six year educational outreach program that makes low-income, minority students living in the neighborhoods surrounding the University of Southern California ready for success in college. The NAI offers seventh through 12th graders a broad range of intensified educational experiences that are planned to produce students with a college bound way of thinking and a holistic preparedness for academic success. The NAI's quest is to reach underserved, local inner-city students who display the longing and tenacity to attend college. This Saturday Academy, sponsored by the NAI, is spread out over 21 Saturday mornings per academic year. It is unique because it also provides two hours each of supplemental instruction in the core areas of Math and English, as well as study and life skills, retention strategies for college, an hour of either financial and career

literacy, and intervention for students struggling academically (USC Neighborhood Academic Initiative, 2010).

North Carolina Central University also sponsors and operates a Saturday Academy, which is offered to all students in grades third through eighth who are performing below grade level. Students who participate in this Saturday Academy attend 13 consecutive Saturdays and receive supplemental educational assistance. The Saturday Academy takes a holistic approach to addressing the needs of at-risk students. One aspect about this particular Saturday Academy is that educators identify students by their low test scores in reading and math. The belief of the sponsor is that in order for students to excel parental involvement is crucial. Because of this, it is mandatory for parents to attend a minimum of five classes created to bring to the attention of parents the following issues: literacy skills, accountability standards, the impact of media on students, and educational development (“Programs”, 2004).

### **Summary**

To summarize, there are a large number of at-risk students, and there are a variety of reasons situations why they were classified as at-risk. The focus of this literature review was African American at-risk students and this is due to the study population, which consists of all African American students. Three indicators that can lead to students becoming at risk if lacking are student engagement, parent engagement, and peer engagement. Two components of the at-risk student background are low socioeconomic class and discipline problems. Almost a third of African American students’ experiences in education are very dissimilar from other ethnic groups. Many results were brought forth from the effects of those experiences. Researchers are seeking to find ways to meet the goal of improving the dropout rate. Therefore resiliency models were created to help meet the goal of decreasing the dropout rate. Motivating at-risk students

should be a central goal of education. Due to the high number of students who are considered at risk, interventions have been developed and implemented on the national, state, and local levels.

The Saturday Academy in this study varies from the others described in this chapter. Although there are distinctive variations, they all share a common goal, which is to intervene on behalf of at-risk students to decrease dropout rates and increase student achievement. Chapter 3 presents the methodology used to qualitatively describe and evaluate the program.



### **Chapter III: Methodology**

The purpose of this chapter is to explain the methods used to conduct the study. The purpose of this study was to explore the perceptions of parents, students, and teachers of the Saturday Academy, an intervention that is being used by the Eagle Bill School District for at-risk students. Qualitative research methodology, consisting of students, teachers, and parent questionnaires and interviews, was used to examine stakeholder perceptions of Saturday Academy. Quantitative data were collected that included MAP scores, Gates McGinninty Reading Test scores, discipline records, classroom grades, and attendance records to verify the qualitative findings. The results are essential to education due to the continuous increase in growth of the lower SES students who are at-risk of failing academically. Many districts nationwide have implemented interventions such as Saturday Academy. In this study, the researcher explored parent, student, and teacher perceptions of the Saturday Academy.

#### **Research Setting and Subjects**

The study was conducted over one semester during the spring of the 2009/2010 school year, in a middle school named Water Valley Middle School (a pseudonym used for the purpose of this study) in a large suburban school district named Eagle Bill (for the purpose of this study). The lead teacher of Saturday Academy and assistant superintendent of secondary education identified students who were at risk of failing academically. While exploring parent, student, and teacher perceptions, classroom observations were conducted by the researcher during scheduled visits to Water Valley Middle School, a seventh and eighth grade middle school.

The indicators that were used to select students who were perceived to be at risk according to the literature review included SES as evidenced by free or reduced lunch and the following indicators: (a) lack of student engagement, (b) lack of parent engagement, (c) lack of

peer engagement, and (d) lack of college preparation activities. According to Horn and Chen (1998), the presence of one of these risk factors indicates low risk, two risk factors indicate moderate risk, and three or more risk factors indicate a high risk of dropping out.

Distinguishing the interventions that are successful in helping students at risk of failing academically may be useful to other schools nationwide. There is a need to know how these types of interventions are perceived. Without the advisement and perspective of students, parents, and teachers, determining the effectiveness of the program would be burdensome.

Using the indicators, student engagement, parent engagement, peer engagement, and college preparation activities, which can also be found in the review of literature, the students with the highest number of risk factors were chosen to participate in the study, this consisted of most of the student body however, only a minimum amount of students participated. The parents of these student participants and teachers who volunteered to participate in the Saturday Academy were chosen to participate in this study as well. Information was collected from the at-risk students, their parents, and teachers in the Saturday Academy via surveys, questionnaires and interviews regarding their perceptions of Saturday Academy. Knowing the perceptions of the aforementioned stakeholders will ultimately help the district provide services that are needed for their student body and may lead to increased student achievement.

Understanding what interventions help at-risk students succeed is important. Out of every 1,000 African American students, 104 will drop out of high school. This statistic is close to Eagle Bill School District's African American student dropout rate. This is why it is urgent to intervene with a successful program (Adams, 2008). The interventions are based on all three Resiliency Models; however, the Challenge Model seems to be the most widely used.

The study took place at Water Valley Middle School that serves approximately 338 students. The school includes Grades 7-8 and is located in St. Louis County, Missouri. Eagle Bill School District serves a total of 11,918 students and spans 92 miles across St. Louis County. It encompasses all or part of 11 municipalities. Eagle Bill School District is comprised of 78.2% African American, 19.5% Caucasian, and 2.2% other minorities (MODESE, 2010). In the Eagle Bill School District, 16.6% of adults over the age of 25 do not have a high school diploma, 65% have a high school diploma or some college, and 18.5% have one or more college or professional degrees within the school district boundaries (MO DESE, 2010). The median family income for the district is \$46,771. In this district, 4.9% of families live below the poverty line with 11% of all students under 18 living in poverty. This information contradicts the 95% of Water Valley Middle School's number of students who receive free and reduced lunch (MODESE, 2010). This is due to many different scenarios. One scenario is common among families at this school—although both parents are working, the families participate in the WIC program (a Food and Nutrition Service program to safeguard the health of low-income **Women, Infants, and Children** up to age five who are at nutritional risk). Then there are many families that have or currently are participating in the Food Stamp Program, a program that helps low-income people buy food. Applications for free and reduced lunch are submitted without verification, and few of the applications are audited throughout the school year; therefore, many families at Water Valley Middle School qualify for free or reduced lunch.

The percentage of students who are retained at Water Valley Middle School is fairly low at 2.81%, as provided by Water Valley Middle School records. The percentage is low because students are mandated to attend summer school if they are failing two or more classes, and Water Valley has implemented interventions like tutoring and enrolling students in two Communication

Arts classes and/or two Math classes for additional help. The suspension rates at Water Valley Middle School average 1.8 incidents per student, and the number of students who received some alternative school education is 13 students over the course of the school year (Water Valley Middle School records). This includes students going to alternative education and those returning from alternative education settings. There were 986 high school seniors (737 of them African American), and the percentage of graduation for the district was 93.5%. This data was collected from Water Valley Middle School's records during the 2009/2010 school year, and represents data from the 2008/2009 school year.

### **Research Questions**

To gain a better understanding of parent, student, and teacher perceptions, this study will answer the following questions:

1. How do students, teachers, and parents perceive Saturday Academy influences student engagement?
2. How do students, teachers, and parents perceive Saturday Academy influences parent engagement?
3. How do students, teachers, and parents perceive Saturday Academy influences peer engagement?
4. Do student attendance, discipline, test scores, and grades align with students, teachers, and parents' perception of them?

### **Procedures**

To begin, permission was obtained from the school district to conduct the study. The researcher took approximately 15 minutes during Saturday Academy, at the end of the school year to explain the study and distribute the consent forms to the students, which would give

permission to the researcher from the parents to interview students. The researcher observed the Saturday Academy at Water Valley Middle School three to five times, towards the end of the 2009/2010 school year. Then, as consent forms were returned, the researcher began to provide questionnaires for both the parents and their participating students. Although parents were in attendance, students took the consent forms and questionnaires home and later returned them. Simultaneously, teachers of the Saturday Academy were provided with questionnaires that did not require a consent form. Lastly, with the permission of the central office administration and for descriptive purposes, the researcher received aggregated data of Saturday Academy student attendance, number and type of discipline incidents, MAP scores, Gates McGinnity Reading Test scores, and grades. All were used to describe the student participants. Finally, these averages were compared to those of the entire Water Valley Middle School population.

### **Instrumentation and Data Collection**

Four instruments were used in this study: student survey (SS), student perception interview questionnaire (SPIQ), parent perception questionnaire (PPQ), and teacher perception interview questionnaire (TPIQ). The details of these instruments and how the data were collected are described in this section.

The SS was created by the researcher and consisted of mixed items including, multiple choice, open ended questions, yes or no responses, and fill in the blank. The survey was created to explore how students perceived their teachers, parents, and peers influence their participation in the Saturday Academy. Discipline and academic standing were also surveyed. Students were asked their perception as to how many discipline incidents they had and they were given four different ranges for grade point averages to choose from. These questions were aligned with the

framing literature from Chapter 2, because they also pertain to the indicators that lead to becoming at-risk students.

The SPIQ was created by the researcher and consisted of 10 questions to explore the perceptions of students of the Saturday Academy. The questionnaire was used to measure the students' view of their participation in the Saturday Academy. The questions from the questionnaire includes the impact Saturday Academy had on them, their level of involvement in Saturday Academy, and the influences friends and family have on their academics. Students were asked what was great about Saturday Academy, would it be better if your friends attended Saturday Academy, and how did your parent support you after you enrolled in Saturday Academy? The 10 questions align directly with the indicators that lead to becoming an at-risk student, within the framing literature from Chapter 2.

The PPQ was created by the researcher and consisted of 10 questions to explore the perceptions of parents of the Saturday Academy. The questionnaire was used to measure the parents' overall perception of Saturday Academy, which included their likes, dislikes, and how they believed their child felt about attending the Academy. The questionnaires were administered by the researcher and the procedure was as follows. To begin, the researcher gained permission from parents to provide both them and their child with a questionnaire to be filled out. Then, the researcher made a request of all participating staff to fill out a questionnaire, as well. After everyone agreed on participating, the researcher provided all three groups with a copy of the questionnaire. The researcher did not use any real names or any identifying information in the study; therefore, the participants' anonymity was protected. Within two to three weeks, everyone filled out their questionnaires, returned them to the researcher, and the

researcher analyzed the data. The questions in the questionnaire were centered on the framing literature from Chapter 2.

The TPIQ was created by the researcher and consisted of 10 questions to explore the perceptions of the teachers who taught in the Saturday Academy. The interview questionnaire was used to measure the teachers' overall perception of the Saturday Academy intervention for at-risk middle school students within Water Valley Middle School's suburban setting. The questionnaire included how they viewed the curriculum, teacher collaboration, and the needs of the students who attend. Along with the alignment with the indicators that lead to becoming an at-risk student, this questionnaire also aligns with the underlying educational problems within the framing literature from Chapter 2.

The questionnaires, interviews, and surveys were conducted at the end of the 2009/2010 school year following the Saturday Academy yearend celebration. This allowed the first time participants, parents, and teachers to fully experience what Saturday Academy had to offer. Parents received an informed consent for participation in research activities along with their parent questionnaires. Parents were told that their questionnaire could be conducted via telephone by the researcher, who would record their responses. After the researcher received parental consent, the researcher interviewed individual students. Finally, all of the participating teachers received a copy of the teacher questionnaire by email. They were given the option of completing the questionnaire online or participating in a face-to-face audio taped interview conducted by the researcher using the questions contained in the questionnaire.

A research proposal that involves human subjects was submitted and approved by the Lindenwood University IRB Review Board. The human subjects that were involved in this

study were not identified; names were changed. Participants in a study could not incur any more risk than they would in any other ordinary encounter in daily life.

All participants were assured that their identity would remain anonymous, that there were no risks, and that there was no compensation. However, an incentive was offered to the students: a snack from the snack bar for each completed consent form, questionnaire, and survey.

### **Methodological Framework**

A qualitative research methodology was chosen because of the researcher's interests in examining the perceptions of parents, students, and teachers who participate in an intervention for at-risk students, and the sample size was too small for statistical analysis. Interviews using the questions from the questionnaire were conducted and surveys were administered in order to gain as much insight as possible into the intervention. Observations of student and teacher interaction by the researcher were conducted at Saturday Academy and recorded using field notes for the purpose of having the opportunity to gain insight into the routine, the interactions between students and teachers, and the experience of Saturday Academy. Attendance, discipline records, and test scores were collected to provide descriptive data. These data were collected to present information that was pertinent to the study. It was collected to describe the characteristics of the at-risk student population who participated in this study. The researcher collected various data in order to depict an in-depth view of Saturday Academy within the research setting.

### **Observations of Saturday Academy**

The purpose of the observations was to gain insight into the routine, the interactions between the students and teachers, and the experience of Saturday Academy. The primary investigator observed the Saturday Academy on three separate occasions for the 4-hour allotment



of time designated for Saturday Academy. The observations provided the primary investigator with the opportunity to examine the interactions, routines, and experience the Saturday Academy. An observation sheet was not utilized. Instead field notes were recorded. The observations provided information that was beneficial to examining perceptions of parents, teachers, and students who participate in an intervention for at-risk students.

A typical day for students enrolled in Saturday Academy began shortly before 8:00 when they arrived by bus. During observations, students seemed to be excited to be at school, even though it was a Saturday morning. A couple of students arrived appearing as though they were tired, but many entered the building talking and laughing, appreciative of the time they had to socialize with their peers. Everyone addressed one another by name, so it appeared as though they all knew one another. Upon arrival, all students signed in with the same teacher in the designated classroom. Students did not bring materials with them. The teachers provided everything students needed after attendance was taken and an overview for the day was given. Most of the students were familiar with the Academy's faculty because they were their teachers during the regular school day. Therefore, they had established relationships, and were familiar with the classrooms and instructional styles.

The Academy was held in the middle school building that was built in the late 1950s. The classrooms are outdated with a mix of old carpet and tiled floors, and concrete blocked walls. Although the building needs to be updated, it is kept very clean and the teachers make their classrooms inviting. One of the classrooms is equipped with a Smart Board that is used during Academy time for enrichment activities like interactive vocabulary games. The students appeared to enjoy the use of technology to learn. They were smiling, sharing with one another the task they were completing on their computers in the computer lab, discussing with one

another what they were doing with the technology, and encouraging one another to participate in the activity. The school has three computer labs, two mobile laptop carts, and approximately six Smart Boards. Even though the school has this technology in the building during the course of a regular school day, each student has limited access to the technology.

Saturday Academy was observed three times, and the last time was for the closing ceremony. The first time, students were engaged in a lesson conducted outside of the classroom. This particular activity was a service learning activity. Students were planting a garden of flowers on school grounds. At least half of the participants seemed to be intrigued by the process, and these same students assisted the teacher with everything. Some of the students had to consistently be redirected, but even they were engaged in the activity. The students socialized as they planted the garden, and this activity took up their academy time.

The second time, the Academy students were doing a follow up classroom assignment in oral and instructional reading. There were approximately 10 students in attendance. After completion, they went to the computer lab where they collectively answered MAP questions and then completed Skills Tutor activities (educational software used for both communication arts and math). Students were then allowed a few minutes of free time on the computer to play educational games. The two Academy teachers had to consistently settle the group down; they appeared to be enjoying their time in the computer lab.

The last time Saturday Academy was observed was for the closing ceremony. On this day, the students arrived by bus as usual. They spent the first hour working on vocabulary and math skills. Some students were using the Smart Board to do a vocabulary activity, or play board games like Scrabble and Boggle. Students seemed to be anxious, awaiting their parents'

arrival for the ceremony. A couple of the students asked to call their parents to make sure they were still coming to the ceremony.

After about an hour of playing educational games while waiting in the classroom, the ceremony began. Six of the seven students were in attendance, and four families showed up to celebrate with their student. The celebration was held in the school's library with the students, their families, two of the Academy teachers, and both principals. The lead teacher began the ceremony with a welcome and introduction of the Academy's staff. This led to the presentation of a video that covered the activities and experiences the students had experienced during Saturday Academy, which was followed by the distribution of certificates.

The teacher celebrated each student with expressions like, "Gina was a hard worker who really enjoyed all of the field trips and was always happy". The student came up to the front to receive the certificate and gift (pictures of the student participating in the Saturday Academy over the course of the school year). The students and their families both looked proud. The principal concluded the ceremony with closing remarks, thanking both the parents and students for their participation in the Saturday Academy. Refreshments were served, and the students and their parents spent another 20 minutes socializing with the Academy faculty and principals.

### **Limitations**

The research design has limitations; therefore, it is important to disclose how the findings may lack the ability to be generalized.

1. At the time of the study, the researcher worked in the Eagle Bill School District as the In School Suspension Teacher, but not in the Saturday Academy.
2. There is only one year of data represented. This is a fairly new program and at the time of the study, there was a possibility that the program might be discontinued.

3. At the time of the study, the study population consisted of all African American students, most of which were male. There were four females enrolled, but only two of them gave consent to participate in the study. The school's population was made up of mostly African American students. Therefore, the study participant representation was reflective of the student body.
4. Some students opted to take their surveys home to fill them out, while other students filled them out in the researcher's presence. The students received their surveys with enough time to complete them independently; however, most of the students chose not to complete them during their leisure time. The researcher made a request to administration to meet with the student participants individually at school so they could complete their surveys.
5. Some teachers independently answered their questions and emailed them back, while others participated in a one-on-one interview with the researcher. The researcher invited all of the teacher participants to be interviewed. However, out of respect for the teachers' time, the option was given to the teachers to fill their questionnaires out independently and return them.
6. Most of the student participants were eighth grade students. There were two seventh graders enrolled in the program, but one of the seventh grader's parents moved her out of the school without any notice to the school. The mobility of at-risk students is a common problem in intervention studies.

### **Summary**

This chapter gave an in-depth explanation from the participants by way of the four instruments that were used: the SS, SPIQ, PPIQ, and the TPIQ. The data collection, helped to

describe the student participants of this study. In this study, data were collected to explore the perceptions of parents, students, and teachers. The next chapter presents the results.

### **Chapter IV: Results**

This study examined the perceptions of students, parents, and teachers who participated in the Saturday Academy. This chapter is organized around the following three research questions: (a) How do students, teachers, and parents perceive Saturday Academy influences student engagement? (b) How do students, teachers, and parents perceive Saturday Academy influences parent engagement? and (c) How do students, teachers, and parents perceive Saturday Academy influences peer engagement? The researcher observed Saturday Academy on a few different occasions for the purpose of observing the Saturday Academy to gain insight into the routine, the interactions between students and teachers, and the experience of Saturday Academy. During the researcher's last observation, she informed parents of her identity and explained the study. Permission was obtained from parents to interview and survey both them and their child. A list of questions was created for the students, teachers, and parents.

After receiving consent, each parent was given a parent perception questionnaire. All of the parents opted to complete their questionnaire at home and return it later. Each of the seven participants was provided with a copy of the student survey, which they filled out in solitaire upon completion. They were then interviewed, using the student questionnaire. The questionnaire and survey were both paper and pencil instruments. Both the questionnaire and survey took approximately 20-30 minutes for each student to complete. A summary of the results of the questionnaire and surveys are provided in this chapter. Observations of the Saturday Academy provided the opportunity to gain insight into the routine, the interactions between students and teachers, and the experience of Saturday Academy. The researcher took notes on the activities the participants were doing, the interactions between the teachers and the student participants, and the student to student interactions. The students remained in one group

and changed classes during Saturday Academy. The researcher observed the entire class period during every visit. The notes are described in more detail later in this chapter.

Using the survey and questionnaires, information was collected from the several students, teachers, and four staff members to determine their perceptions of student attendance, their opinions, and student academic achievement. The researcher also received quantitative data relating to retention rates, discipline, standardized tests, and free and reduced lunch eligibility from the school district's office to be used in descriptive summary. The surveys and questionnaires were based on four research-based indicators that lead to at-risk students failing academically that lead to a high risk of dropping out of school.

### **Characteristics of Participants**

The study site for the research is located in a suburban school district in the Midwest called Eagle Bill. The district covers 92 square miles and encompasses all or part of 11 municipalities. The district study district consists of 17 elementary schools, three middle schools, and three high schools. The demographic data provided by MO DESE (2009) stated that the district's population in 2009 consisted of 11,955 students. Ethnic representation of the district is .8% Asian, 78.2% African American, 1.3% Hispanic, .1% Indian, and 19.5% Caucasian. The middle school in which the study took place serves approximately 300 students; it is the smallest middle school in the district. The student body at Water Valley Middle School is transient, and students typically live in nontraditional households (i.e., grandmother, uncle, cousins, along with their immediate family). The ethnic representation of the school is 99% African American and 1% Caucasian. The only students who were chosen for this study were those who consistently attended the Saturday Academy. Every student who participated in the

Saturday Academy was African American. The make-up of the group was five boys and two girls. Student names are fictitious to protect their anonymity.

Table 1

*Saturday Academy Student Participant Characteristics*

Name	Age	Gender	Free/Reduced Lunch Status	GPA
Gina	14	Female	Free	2.7
George	14	Male	Free	1.1
Ramone	13	Male	Free	2.9
Jalisa	16	Female	Reduced	3.1
Jason	16	Male	Reduced	.95
Carl	14	Male	Reduced	1.8
Gerald	15	Male	Free	2.5

*Note.* From the Water Valley Middle School

The Academy's student participants represented the largest ethnic population in the school district, African American. Table 1 illustrates that these participants are at-risk students. For example, all of the participants received free or reduced lunch, and poor school performance is related to low SES (Paik & Walberg, 2007). In addition, nearly half of the student participants were a year or two older than the common middle school student. According to Paik and Walberg (2007), 15 million children are retained every year, and failed students rarely recover academically. It is difficult for these students to catch up and keep progressing academically. Being two years older than your classmate is an indicator that a student has been retained, therefore these are the students who struggle to recover, which leads to being at risk. The at-risk



indicators are illustrated in Table 1, which make these participants ideal candidates for the Saturday Academy.

### **Survey Responses**

The responses to the surveys and questionnaires completed by the students' parents and teacher participants will be discussed in the following order: (a) SS, (b) SPIQ, (c) PPQ, and (d) TPIQ. A summary of all the responses to the instruments will follow.

**Student Survey.** The SS was created to explore how students perceived their teachers, parents, and peers influenced their participation in the Saturday Academy. There are a variety of items on the survey and the results are reported in the order the items appear on the survey. The type of items in the survey include multiple choice questions, open ended questions, yes or no questions, and complete the sentence. The following are descriptions of the student responses to survey questions/statements from the SS in numerical order.

*SS item #1: I attended Saturday Academy.* When students were asked to rate their attendance at Saturday Academy, they all responded that they attended most, if not all, of the sessions. The Academy's attendance was high for the small number of students participating. Small class size may have also played a role; students are missed if they are absent. The high attendance may be an indication that the students like Saturday Academy.

*SS Item #2: I learned a lot in Saturday Academy.* Most of the students felt they learned a lot in Saturday Academy. One of the two who responded with "no" had a parent who expressed the same opinion, so maybe the parent's opinion influenced the student's opinion. This could reflect the Academy's goal of relating to students' real life experiences, perhaps in contrast to their regular academic courses.

*SS Item #2a: What was the most important thing you learned?* When asked about the most important thing learned in Saturday Academy, a couple of students chose not to answer while a couple of others felt that social skills were the most important thing. The others said that banking, particularly money matters, were the most important subjects they studied. None mentioned traditional academic content like algebra or literary elements.

*SS Item #3: The teachers really seemed to care if I learned.* All of the student participants agreed that the teachers cared if they learned. There appeared to be a good interaction between the students and teachers. Again, this may be affected by the small student to teacher ratio.

*SS Item #4: My parents supported me attending the Saturday Academy.* All but one of the students felt that their parents supported their attendance. The majority stated that their parents woke them up on Saturday morning and made sure that they did not miss their bus, along with attending the end of the year awards celebration. The one student who felt that parent support was lacking was a student whose parent spoke rather negatively about the Saturday Academy.

*SS Item #5: My friends encouraged me to attend Saturday Academy.* Most of the students said that their friends did not encourage them to attend the Saturday Academy. Friends thought that there was something better that they could be doing with their Saturdays. The entire student body was invited to participate, and the student participants' explanation may help to explain why the enrollment was so low. One of the students had a supportive friend, but this student was also in the Academy.

*SS Item #6: My discipline record includes (complete the sentence).* The discipline problem and academic achievement are closely interconnected (Adams, 2008). All of the

participants received discipline referrals in school (see Table 2). The majority of the participants answered that they had only received between one and three referrals. However, the remainder of the participants indicated that they had received more than three referrals. The data provided by the district shows that the majority of the students district-wide were passing with a GPA of 2.5 or higher, but nearly half of the Saturday Academy participants were below 2.0. Overall, the participants' grade point average and their discipline are closely interconnected. The GPAs of the Saturday Academy participants were somewhat proof of Adam's (2008) statement.

Table 2

*My Discipline Record Includes (complete the sentence)*

Name	More than 5 referrals this school year	3-5 referrals this school year	1-3 referrals this school year	No referrals
Gina			x	
Greg		x		
Ramone			x	
Jalisa		x		
Jason	x			
Carl			x	
Gerald	x			

*Note:* From the Water Valley Middle School

*SS Item 7: My GPA is (finish the sentence).* Students were asked to provide their GPA, and the participants' actual GPA was provided by the school district (see Table 1). When the GPAs provided by the two different sources were compared, it was interesting to find that the self-reported GPAs and the actual GPAs were vastly different. The students who said that they did not know their GPA had very low GPAs. However, students who had the lowest GPA were

those who were the most accurate self-reporters. The other participants were inaccurate self-reporters and said their GPA was lower than listed by the school district.

*SS Item #8: My grades have improved because of Saturday Academy.* Three of the students felt that their grades did not improve because of the Academy, while others were unsure, and another student felt that his grades improved. One of the goals of the Academy is to provide different experiences that give students something more to write about that may provoke thinking. There is a possibility that because their experiences in Saturday Academy were so different, the manifestation of those experiences may come later.

When the students were asked to explain their answers, three of the students did not give an explanation about why they thought their grades improved because of Saturday Academy. However, one of the two students who responded with “maybe” stated that he had not compared his grades and the other felt that she was doing her school work a lot. Two of the last three students who responded “no” said that their mother would be on their case if their grades had not improved, and the third said that different work is done in the academy than the work done in school.

*SS Item #9: My previous MAP scores in both Math and Communication Arts were (complete the sentence).* Nearly half of the students were unaware of their MAP Math scores, whereas the other half believed they were scoring high (see Table 3). The district data stated just the opposite. All of the participants were scoring Basic and Below Basic in Communication Arts, and, with the exception of one participant, all were scoring Basic and Below Basic in Math as well. Again, students realized the importance of scoring high on the MAP test, which is probably why many of them stated that they were scoring high. It may be a good idea to consistently make students aware of their MAP test scores and advise the students on how to

increase their scores. Part of the selection process for Saturday Academy participants included those students who were scoring Basic and Below Basic on the MAP test in both Math and Communication Arts.

Table 3

*SS Item #9: My previous MAP scores in both Math and Communication Arts were advanced, proficient, nearing proficiency, basic, below basic, or I don't remember*

Name	Advanced	Proficient	Nearing Proficiency	Basic	Below Basic	Don't Remember
Gina		x				
Greg						x
Ramone			x			
Jalisa						x
Jason						x
Carl		x				
Gerald			x			

*Note.* From Water Valley Middle School.

*SS Item #10: I think Saturday Academy helps kids like me to do better in school.* Most students felt that Saturday Academy does help children like themselves do better in school, while two others thought the opposite. These two students said they were expecting to be tutored during the Saturday Academy.

*SS Item #11: After high school I plan to (complete the sentence).* All students chose among the following: going to college, getting a job, getting training for a job, or I do not think I will finish high school. All of the students chose *going to college*. One of the students responded to all the survey statements positively. This participant may have answered this way because he was trying to communicate that dropping out of high school is not an option for him.

More than likely this participant is seeking to pursue college, job training, and getting a job. He intends to graduate and become a productive citizen.

*SS Item #12: Attending Saturday Academy was good for me.* Greg elaborated, “It was good because I learned new things.” All of the students expressed that attending Saturday Academy was good for them. This is a good start; hopefully they can begin to see the academic benefits as well. “It kept me learning and excited,” said Ramone. When the students were asked to explain their answers, one of the students did not answer while the other responses were split, but in agreement. Half of the students felt that Saturday Academy gave them other options. “It kept me out of the street and out of trouble.” The other half stated that it helped them with their learning. “It was good because I learned new things”.

*SS Item #13: Saturday Academy has changed the way I act in school.* Most of the students did not feel as though the Academy changed the way they act in school. Two of the students felt it did, while one other student (one who is consistently well behaved) was unsure. Social skills that are taught in the classroom were reinforced during Saturday Academy. One of the important things that students said they learned was “about communication and friendships,” and another student stated that “it is important to help everyone.” There is a possibility that over a longer period of time, students may begin to feel that Saturday Academy is changing the way they act in school.

*SS Item #14: I liked going to Saturday Academy.* All but one of the students liked going to Saturday Academy. The one student who responded “sometimes” is a student who lacked parental support. The other students, who did like Saturday Academy, had the support from their parents.

**Student Perception Interview Questionnaire.** The SPIQ was created to explore the perceptions of students of the Saturday Academy. The interview questionnaire was used to measure the students' view of their participation in the Saturday Academy. The following are descriptions of the student responses to survey questions/statements from the SPIQ in numerical order.

*SPIQ #1: Why did you decide to attend Saturday Academy?* Most of the answers alluded to the students having something to do on Saturday. One student said, "It is a chance to leave the house." Another student stated, "It is something to do on Saturday, not just stay at home." There was only one answer that was somewhat different. "I responded to a mailing. I was interested in the activities being offered. I thought it would be fun," responded Gerald. Gerald is also the student who lacked parental support and felt that he did not learn a lot in Saturday Academy.

*SPIQ #2: Did your parent allow you the choice to participate in Saturday Academy? How did they support you after you enrolled?* All of the participants answered with a yes, they all felt that they were allowed the choice to participate in Saturday Academy. At least three of the participants stated that their parents were supportive by waking them up on Saturdays so that they could attend. One of the other participants said, "She encouraged me to keep going and not to stop so that I could learn more." Another student said, "My parent did not care. It was my choice if I wanted to go."

*SPQ #3: What were you expecting from Saturday Academy?* Participants gave answers like field trips, projects, and fun activities. One of the participants responded, "To learn stuff that I had not learned before." Another participant replied, "A lot, I thought it would be like regular school."

*SPIQ #4: How was your relationship with your Saturday Academy teachers?* All of the students appeared to have a relationship with one if not all of the teachers in the Academy. Many responded with “good.” The relationships they had probably ensured the students that the teachers genuinely cared about their learning.

*SIPQ #5: Would you attend Saturday Academy again next year if it were offered?* “Yes cause it’s fun,” stated Carl. With the exception of one participant, they all agreed. The one student who did not say yes replied, “Maybe, because of the kids. They don’t know me. Maybe they’ll say something to me, and I’m going to say something back.” This participant did not appear to have any problems getting along with the current participants, but he was the participant with the most discipline referrals. He received many of his referrals because of confrontations in the classroom. Saturday Academy teachers also taught social skills and included cooperative learning activities. Maybe these lessons are beneficial to a student who is experiencing these issues, and these lessons can be carried over into the classroom.

*SPIQ #6: What did your friends think about you attending Saturday Academy?* Gerald said, “They didn’t care. It was none of their business.” A few of the participants stated that their friends wanted to come but did not know how to get enrolled. “They didn’t think it was right. They said they needed their Saturdays more,” stated Ramone.

*SPIQ #7: Are any of your friends attending Saturday Academy?* All of the students stated “yes”. The participants were observed regularly during the regular school day and had not observed participants interacting with one another, but with other peer groups. Therefore, it is assumed that they befriended one another during the Saturday Academy. Ramone stated, “Yes, because it was fun and we were out of trouble.” One of the participants named the friends that



he made, while another said, “Only three. By the end I was the only one left in Saturday Academy.”

*SPIQ #8: Would it be better if your friends attended too?* Two of the participants said “yes”. One felt that it would be encouragement for them to come and the other said, “It would be more fun.” The other participants said no. Two of the participants explained that if their friends attended, it would not be good. “No, cause they bad, getting on teachers’ nerves, and they won’t be able to tell us nothing.”

*SPIQ #9: What is your academic goal for the next school year?* There were two common themes in the answers the students gave: one was increasing their GPA and the other was putting forth effort. “To keep my GPA up, over 3.5,” responded Gina. Another student said, “To try harder.”

*SPIQ #10: What was your goal for the beginning of this school year (August 2009)?* Three of the participants indicated that they want to increase their GPA, while two others shared the goal of making it out of middle school. The other participants gave varying answers. “To work my hardest,” one participant said. Another stated that he did not know, “I don’t think I had one.”

*SPIQ #11: What are your plans after high school?* Every participant answered, “Go to college.” Some participants elaborated, and they all seemed to believe that they should further their education. One participant said, “Go to college, get trained for a job, get a job, and hopefully own a job.” The student who was experiencing a number of discipline issues stated that he was going to college. He seemed unsure, so the researcher asked if he still planned to go, and he responded, “Uh, huh!”

*SPIQ #12: What are your friends' plans for after high school?* Four of the participants responded, "I don't know." Two of the participants responded, "Go to college." The only other response was that one of his friends was going to college, some were not, and some were going to get a job.

*SPIQ #13: Has Saturday Academy had any impact on your plans for after high school?* The responses were equally divided. Two students said "no". Two others said "yes". "Teachers said that going to college gives you more choices in life." The last two replied, "Kinda, because they told us some ways how to get to college and how it helps us and the rest would be on us."

*SPIQ #14: Did you feel challenged by the learning activities provided by Saturday Academy?* All of the students said "no". "No, because it was basic math," replied one participant. Another student said, "No, because all you do is what you would do in regular school."

*SPIQ #15: What would you change about Saturday Academy?* Three of the participants stated that they would change nothing. Some of the other participants gave varying responses. Jalisa said, "I would change the way they did it. Like some classes and mostly field trips." Two other participants agreed with Jalisa; they were interested in more field trips. Gerald said, "Add more activities, not so much work like stuff, more experiences."

*SPIQ #16: What was great about Saturday Academy?* Most students agreed upon the field trips. Some participants made mention of the teachers. "The activities we did and most of the teachers," said one participant. One participant simply stated, "I had fun."

*SPIQ #17: What do your parents think about your attendance at Saturday Academy?* One participant responded with nothing as his answer. The common theme for this question is that parents were pleased with their child having something productive to do on a Saturday

morning. “They wanted you to go, thought it would be good for me to get out of the house,” said one participant. Another participant said, “They think it is great, keeps me off the streets and keeps me from being at home.”

*SPIQ #18: What extracurricular activities are you involved in?* Gerald along with one other participant stated, “I am not involved in any extracurricular activities.” The other participants gave varying answers such as tutoring, basketball, football, lacrosse, and track and field. School engagement and achievement are related to student involvement in extracurricular activities (Cosden et al., 2004).

*SPIQ #19: How long have you been involved in these activities?* Only a couple of students have participated in extracurricular activities for a substantial amount of time (football since age eight or nine), and others’ length of time was for a short period of time. One participant played basketball for a few weeks and said, “I don’t like to stay in certain activities for that long.”

*SPIQ #20: What made you join those activities?* “To catch up on work and get extra help,” was the response given by the one student who did participate in tutoring. Those students who participate in athletics mostly agreed that they joined because they liked the sport. One other participant said, “My mom.” One of the participants who did not participate said, “I’m waiting on better choices.”

**Parent Perception Questionnaire.** The PPQ was created to explore the perceptions of parents of the Saturday Academy. The questionnaire was used to measure parents’ overall perception of Saturday Academy, which included their likes, dislikes, and how they believed their child felt about attending the Academy. The following are descriptions of the parent responses to the questions in the PPQ in numerical order.

*PPQ #1: What were you expecting from Saturday Academy?* Overall, parents were expecting their children to get assistance with their academics and learn new skills that would help them in their regular classrooms.

*PPQ #2: What changes have you observed in your child this school year?* From those parents who observed changes, they generally stated that their children were excited and looked forward to participating in different activities.

*PPQ #3: Would you attribute any of these changes to Saturday Academy? Why or why not?* The majority of the parents did not answer this question. The ones who did directly tied it in to their child's excitement about education. "He is able to participate in different activities."

*PPQ #4: Why did you choose to support your child attending Saturday Academy?* Parents thought it would help their academics. "It was free," said many parents, and these parents along with one other stated that her child had a previous positive experience with the Academy.

*PPQ #5: Where do you think your child will be in five years?* Every parent responded, "He/she should have gone to college in five years."

*PPQ #6: What would you change about Saturday Academy?* While one parent would not change anything, others stated that they would like to see the Academy address issues that their child is having in school. One parent said, "Provide more field trips," and another parent stated, "I would like to receive progress reports."

*PPQ #7: What does your child think about Saturday Academy?* Most of the parents agreed that their child likes the extra activities, and they all responded, "Field trips." One of the parents mentioned, "My child enjoyed the extra day spent with his peers." Overall, their students liked Saturday Academy.

*PPQ #8: Do you feel as though your child's needs are being met in Saturday Academy?*

Two parents were not sure. Another parent said, "I don't see the need for the program." Two parents said, "My child's needs were met," and one parent from the previous year, who did not explain why, felt they were met better the previous year.

*PPQ #9: If invited to participate again next school year, will you encourage your child to participate again?* All but one of the parents said yes. The apprehensive parent stated, "If they would help more with grades and the things the students didn't understand during the current year, they would participate again."

*PPQ #10: What do you think of the teachers of Saturday Academy?* All of the parents responded to this question after the closing ceremony. Two of the parents liked them, while the others expressed how they did not know them.

*PPQ #11: How much communication do you have with your child's school?* Parents communicate with the school via EdLine (parent accessible computer software), weekly reports, emails, phone calls, and visiting regularly. There was only one parent who did not communicate much except for when the school called him to report misbehavior.

*PPQ#12: What helps or hinders this communication?* A parent stated, "One helpful thing was the teachers being willing and helpful. Another was being able to call and email." Some of the parents expressed, "My hindrances are being without transportation and having to work a lot."

*PPQ #13: What is your level of education?* One of the parents is a college graduate, while the others have completed high school with all but one of the high school graduates having some college education. Most at-risk students have parents who did not complete high school, and a higher number did not complete college.

**Teacher Perception Interview Questionnaire.** The TPIQ was created to explore the perceptions of the teachers who taught in the Saturday Academy. The interview questionnaire was used to measure the teacher's overall perception of the Saturday Academy intervention for at-risk middle school students within Water Valley Middle School. The teachers opted to write out their interview responses and email them to me because of lack of availability. The rest of the teachers were interviewed face to face. The following are descriptions of the teacher responses to the questions in the TPIQ in numerical order.

*TPIQ #1: What primary need exists for at-risk students?* One teacher felt that the students' environment needs to expose them to success, while another teacher said, "They need structure, encouragement, explicit instruction, group, and lecture." Another teacher added, "Our students need the basic foundation in math and reading skills." Finally, one teacher offered the suggestion of extra directed instruction in areas of weakness and more life experiences to have increased vocabulary to relate to reading and writing. All of the teachers gave different answers, but they all agreed that at-risk students need tools that lead to academic success.

*TPIQ #2: What is the difficulty of meeting these needs?* One teacher responded, "As teachers, you see them 6-7 hours a day, and they return to environments that set them up for being at-risk." Another teacher agreed with the amount of time needed, but she included funding and scheduling. The other two teachers had answers that were similar. They both stated, "Distinguishing what each student needs their behavior and trying to motivate them toward learning."

*TPIQ #3: Do you feel like Saturday Academy is meeting the expectations that were set out from the beginning?* All the answers varied. One teacher answered yes, two teachers answered "no", and one responded with "to some extent." One of the teachers who responded

with “no” said, “I feel that the math component was overwhelming, and Saturdays turned into a play date.” Another teacher stated, “What I saw as the positives were four field trips, a community service project, and the focus on math and communication arts.” The only teacher who responded with “yes” felt that the Academy provided an alternative way of learning. It was a situation where students would definitely receive immediate feedback. They received scores and had the opportunity to learn by way of playing a game.

*TPIQ #4: What can be done during Saturday Academy to increase student achievement?*

This is another area where the teachers’ answers were strongly interrelated. “We need more structured class setting with less field trips”; “more one-on-one time with specific skills”; “more time—all day trips” were some of the teachers’ answers. Focusing on particular weaknesses; setting solid goals that are attainable; showing them incremental steps to achieve those goals; individualizing classes so students can reach goals; and making it visual, are answers they all agreed upon. An additional comment made by one of the teachers was, “The Academy needs more teachers.”

*TPIQ #5: Are you experiencing any behavior problems in Saturday Academy?* One teacher stated, “I have structures in place, and I have given out student expectations along with incentives.” Two of the other teachers responded with “yes”, due to the students believing that they do not have to follow normal school policies. “Their behaviors including talking back, sassing, stealing breakfast foods, and selecting where they sit.” The last of the four teachers interviewed stated, “The behavior entailed minor disruptions/disagreements between students and one incident where one special needs student required help from administrative staff that was on hand.”

*TPIQ #6: To what extent, if any, do you receive parental engagement?* Everyone agreed that parents, for the majority, participated in the completion ceremony. A few of the teachers had the opportunity to conference with parents over the phone, and they also conference with parents in person. One teacher stated, “That communicating with parents was my hope of getting a better understanding of their child’s behavior.”

*TPIQ #7: What is the level of collaboration between you and the other Saturday Academy teachers?* One of the teachers worked in the middle school building last school year and will be returning the following school year. She, in particular, found it difficult to collaborate. “For the most part, it is because I work in another building in the district.” Two of the teachers agreed that they were afforded the opportunity to team up with a partner who taught the same subject. One teacher said, “There were so many field trips, this made it difficult to create follow up lessons with winter breaks, field trips, etc.”

*TPIQ #8: Do students seem to be motivated by their peers who are enrolled in the program with them?* Yes, students encouraged one another to attend and complete tasks. In this particular group, the behavior is anti-social; if someone leads, the others will follow. “On a scale 1-10, I would say 7. I found the students bragging about flying a plane. However, the other students were not disenchanted for not attending.” Another teacher said, “I observed some healthy competition for math fact games and peer motivation as students worked in groups/teams for writing.”

*TPIQ #9: How would you describe student engagement at Saturday Academy?* One of the teachers did not answer this question. Two of the teachers had similar answers, one stating, “The students were mostly very engaged and cooperative; lessons were designed to be fun and



different from the traditional school day.” While the other stated, “They were engaged, didn’t want it to be another day in school, so it needed to be different.”

*TPIQ #10: Do you think Saturday Academy is the answer for African American students who are failing academically?* One teacher said, “The program is for all students.” Another stated that there is not just one answer, but giving students extra time and attention, unconditional care, and field trips that they might not otherwise have is key to all students being successful. “Supplying students with a portfolio to show their work, giving them the opportunity to be successful in a school environment without the grades all make me say yes.” The last teacher interviewed responded with “no”, but mentioned that the Academy is a good intervention. The teacher stated that there is no one size that fits all.

*TPIQ #11: What changes have you observed in the students in Saturday Academy over the course of the school year?* Some of the behaviors that the entire group of teachers responded with were “better behavior, better self-image, self-confidence, some are more responsible, and overall they have learned to play nice together, they learned bi-plays for social interaction.” There was only one teacher who said, “I was unable to track any changes due to the students being on other teams during the school day.”

*TPIQ # 12: How do you feel Saturday Academy has changed students’ attitudes toward post secondary planning?* One teacher stated, “To my knowledge all regular attending students plan to go to college,” while another was not sure that it had. He felt that those who were planning to go to college beforehand are still planning to go to college. There may be a little more direction in the area of concentration. One teacher responded, “This question did not apply.” The last response was, “I feel this is planting a seed subconsciously toward more learning. We touched on compound interest in math and goal setting briefly.”

The teachers who taught during the Saturday Academy had various answers on a number of questions; however, they all seemed to be genuinely interested in the academic success of the participants, and they can all see some benefit of the program. All of the teachers have at least taught in this building, where the students attend, so they were all familiar with this body of at-risk students and their academic needs. They appeared to all see the need for collaboration in order to better serve the participants, which could in turn deter some of the behaviors that were shared and lead up to observations of more positive changes and attitudes with the student participants. The teachers did not harp on parental engagement but subtly implied that it may help, especially with the students' behaviors. Most of the teachers can see some of the expectations that were set out from conception of Saturday Academy being met, but most of them had suggestions for improvement, like gearing it more toward females.

### **Descriptive Data Results**

This secondary data gathered from Water Valley Middle School's district office included Communication Arts and Math MAP data for the 2008/2009 school year, (see Tables 4 & 6). The researcher also gathered data for the Gates McGinnity Reading Test and the number of days absent from school for the 2009/2010 school year. The Gates McGinnity Reading Test, discipline incidents, and attendance were gathered from Water Valley Middle School's district office.

Table 4

*Communication Arts MAP Scores in the 2008-2009 School Year*

Name	Below Basic	Basic	Proficient	Advanced
Gina		x		
Greg	x			
Ramone		x		
Jalisa		x		
Jason		x		
Carl	x			
Gerald	x			
Water Valley Middle School	17%	59%	14%	4%

*Note.* From Water Valley Middle School

Table 5

*Attendance for Saturday Academy Participants During Regular School*

Name	Days Present	Days Absent	Attendance Average
Gina	165	10	94.3
Greg	167	8	95.4
Ramone	163	12	93.1
Jalisa	172	3	98.3
Jason	168	7	96.0
Carl	173	2	98.8
Gerald	174	1	99.4

*Note.* From Water Valley Middle School

The majority of the participants scored Basic; however, all of the participants scored below basic and below on the MAP Communication Arts. The levels Below Basic, Basic, Proficient, and Advanced, measure what students should know and be able to do at each grade assessed. Below Basic are scores that are below the basic level of achievement. Basic is also where the majority of the Water Valley Middle School student body scores occurred. Seventy-seven percent of the entire student body needed an intervention that assisted them in increasing academic achievement. An intervention was planned in response to low achievement scores at the Water Valley Middle School.

Table 6

*Math MAP Scores in the 2008-2009 School Year*

Name	Below Basic	Basic	Proficient	Advanced
Gina	x			
Greg	x			
Ramone	x			
Jalisa		x		
Jason	x			
Carl		x		
Gerald		x		
Water Valley Middle School	37%	43%	14%	1%

*Note.* From Water Valley Middle School

Math MAP scores were also reflective of a need for an intervention. All of the participants, with the exception of one, scored at the Basic or Below Basic level. Only one student scored at the Proficient level. Water Valley Middle School student body’s majority

scored Basic, with a total of 80% of the student body scoring at Basic or Below Basic level (see Table 6).

Table 7

*Gates McGinnity Reading Scores in the 2008-2009 School Year - Post Test*

Name	At Grade Level	Month/s Below Grade Level	1 year Below Grade Level	2 years Below Grade Level	3+ years Below Grade Level
Gina	x				
Greg					x
Ramone	x				
Jalisa					x
Jason					x
Carl			x		
Gerald	x				
Water Valley Middle School	32%	16%	24%	15%	13%

*Note.* From Water Valley Middle School

The largest percentages of students were reading on grade level at 32% at Water Valley Middle School. With the exception of one student, half of the participants of Saturday Academy were reading three plus years below, and the other half of the participants were on level, according to their Gates McGinnity Reading Scores (see Table 7). The MAP Communication Arts Test is different from the Gates McGinnity Reading Test. The MAP tests for a different set of skills than the Gates McGinnity Reading Test, which only tests for spelling and vocabulary.

Table 8

*Discipline Incidents in the 2008/2009 School Year*

Type of Incident	Saturday Academy Participants	Water Valley Middle School Population	Saturday Academy Average	School WVMS Average
Total # of Incidents	35	1,816	.1	5.2
Out-of-School Suspension	4	859	8.75	2.1
In School Suspension	17	355	2	5.1
Detentions	16	991	2.1	2.9
Saturday Detention	4	136	8.75	.4

*Note.* Out of school suspension refers to students being suspended from attending school. In-school suspension is designed to penalize students for their negative behaviors. Students remain in one classroom all day, while still participating academically in some way. Detentions are a punishment in which students have to stay after school, while others go home, and work on assignments for two hours. Saturday Detention is like regular detention, except it is held on Saturday for four hours, and is assigned to students who skip regular detention or have received a number of referrals within one school week.

Saturday Academy had the highest averages in out-of-school suspensions and Saturday detentions, and when they were assigned detentions on Saturday, it conflicted with Saturday Academy. The whole school's highest averages were assigned to in school suspension and detention (see Table 8). Although Saturday Academy's averages were still below the school average, the Academy's highest number of incidents that occurred resulted in out-of-school suspension and detention. Water Valley Middle School's highest number of incidents resulted in detention and out-of-school suspensions. Suspensions and disruptive behaviors are a few school problems that students who are at risk often experience. As illustrated in Table 8, the numbers of incidents are a good indication that the students at Water Valley Middle School were experiencing school problems associated with behavior.

The student participants of the Saturday Academy all had high attendance averages. Low attendance is an indicator for at-risk students. Failing to attend school leads to students disengaging, this may lead to dropping out of school (Balfanz et al., 2007). This is one of the many identifiers that cannot be applied to the Saturday Academy participants. The participants' average attendance is 90% and above. This is an area of strength for this particular group of at-risk students.

### **Summary**

The purpose of Chapter 4 was to report the results of the data analysis. The perceptions of students, parents, and teachers who participated in the Saturday Academy were presented. To summarize, students who participated in this intervention need more engaging activities. The students have a good relationship with their teachers, their attendance for both school and the Academy is high, and they are all interested in pursuing higher education. The parents more so than the students would like to see some tutoring and tailored instruction occur during Saturday

Academy time. They are supportive of the Saturday Academy because it provides their child with something productive to do on a Saturday. On the other hand, they would like to see their children receive more academic assistance. Teachers are in need of support of the negative behaviors like defiance that are counterproductive to Saturday Academy. They are aware of ways to increase student achievement during Saturday Academy, but they also realize that there are obstacles such as time to collaborate and prepare activities that need to be addressed that prevent them from increasing achievement.

The quantitative results were used to determine the need for an intervention. MAP scores were a good indicator that there was a need for an intervention. Low achievement scores for the Water Valley Middle School as a whole created a sense of urgency for the district office to intervene. One of the goals of Saturday Academy was to increase achievement, including MAP scores.

The Gates McGinnity was administered to all students at the Water Valley Middle School. The participants of Saturday Academy scores were split with almost half of them reading on grade level and almost half reading three plus years below grade level. This was not reflective of the entire student body. The largest percentage (32%) was on grade level with only 13% who were three or more years below grade level. The Gates McGinnity was another area of concern that led to the need for an intervention.

Both the student body and Saturday Academy participants were experiencing school problems associated with behavior. The highest number of incidents resulted in detention and out-of-school suspension for Saturday Academy participants. However, detention and in school suspension were the highest number of incidents resulted for the Water Valley Middle School student body. Discipline was another area of concern that also led to creating an intervention.



The Saturday Academy participants had high attendance averages at Water Valley Middle School. Their attendance at Saturday Academy closely matched their regular school attendance. The analysis of attendance does not necessarily indicate a need for an intervention. However, when analyzing test scores and discipline, the data revealed the need for an intervention.

Chapter 5 provides discussion of the study findings studied, followed by some observations that were made, recommendations that could improve an intervention for at-risk African American students, and suggestions for additional research.

## **Chapter V: Discussion and Recommendations**

This study analyzed the perceptions of parents, students, and teachers of Saturday Academy. Research-based indicators that lead to students becoming at-risk were used to guide the creation of the study instruments. These research-based indicators are student engagement, parent engagement, peer engagement, and college preparation activities.

The researcher created four instruments: SS, SPIQ, PPQ, and TPIQ. The researcher collected descriptive data that is measurable including attendance, standardized test scores, and discipline incidents. The descriptive data were put into tables and then analyzed and compared to the perceptions of students, parents, and peers. The researcher observed a number of sessions of the Saturday Academy and made observational notes as a third data source.

### **Summary of the Results**

There were four research questions. The first three research questions were created to gain a better understanding of parent, student, and teacher perceptions. These three questions guided the study. The last research question was created to address the secondary descriptive data that were collected.

*Answering Research Question One: How do students, teachers, and parents perceive Saturday Academy influences on student engagement?* Student engagement refers to students' participation and attendance in extracurricular activities and school in general. According to Fredricks and Eccles (2006), extracurricular activity is important as it relates to student engagement with students from low-income families. These activities help to build character and are considered part of a well-rounded education.

Extracurricular activities increase the likelihood of students' sense of attachment to their school. Research supports interests in nonacademic activities. Supporting these interests helps

educators tap into strengths, while losing the focus on students' deficits. This in turn increases the likelihood of higher academic achievement and completion of high school. The students who participate in the Saturday Academy never discussed participation in after school activities. A couple of the students did participate in extracurricular activities, but they were not activities that were associated with school. During the 2009-2010 school years, there were not many extracurricular activities that were appealing to the student body. Students were offered tutoring, yearbook and a reading club for afterschool activities. Most of the students who stayed after stayed for the yearbook club. Parents expressed the desire for a variety of afterschool activities such as sports and choir. Although the school activities were not appealing enough to their student, some parents appeared to be interested in their student participating in extracurricular activities; therefore they sought out activities elsewhere.

Fortunately within the classroom, all of Saturday Academy teachers appeared to be interested in having effective classroom management through the use of engaging activities. The teachers did not want to incur all of the problematic behaviors that they face in the regular classroom during the course of the week. Teachers anticipated that Saturday Academy would be different in that students would be engaged in different ways of learning new things, and behavior issues would be minimal. Results from the observations and instrumentation, demonstrated that all of the teachers exemplified patience with the students, and set high expectations and perceived that Saturday Academy had a positive effect on student engagement.

Motivation and resiliency are two elements that pertain to student engagement. All but one of the Saturday Academy participants succeeded in motivating their students by encouraging them to participate. The teachers succeeded in motivating their students by promoting peer collaboration as opposed to individual competition. In the end, students felt confident in their

ability to successfully complete a task, which builds more motivation. Participants of the Saturday Academy had support from their parents, and although they may have been exposed to trauma or violence in their home lives, they were resilient in that they were putting forth effort in Saturday Academy.

*Answering Research Question Two: How do students, teachers, and parents perceive Saturday Academy influence parent engagement?* According to student responses, students would not have attended Saturday Academy with the same level of regularity had it not been for their parents effort in getting them there. However, teachers did not see much parental involvement beyond the exception of the closing ceremony. Teachers wanted more parental engagement such as volunteering in the classroom or chaperoning field trips to improve student engagement.

Parents, for the most part, expressed the feeling of signing up for one thing and getting another. Parents' expectations for the Academy were different from what their children actually experienced. Parents stated that they expected their students' academic weaknesses to be addressed, and that their child would receive support or homework. Parents would have also liked seeing their children take more field trips during Saturday Academy. However, they all noted that Saturday Academy gave their child something productive to do on Saturdays. Parents stated that they chose to support their student because they thought the academy would help their students' academics, and it was at no cost to the parents.

Many benefits are gained when parents become engaged. Engaged parents attend parent-teacher conferences, encourage homework completion, and make sure their children attend regularly, to name a few ways parents can be engaged. The level of parental engagement overall at Water Valley Middle School is low; however, the perception of the parents of Saturday

Academy participants, with the exception of one, was parental engagement with Saturday Academy was adequate (e.g. level of communication).

Saturday Academy parents communicated with the school through email, phone calls, visits, and EdLine (website specific to Water Valley Middle school). The parents' message was clear, that is, they prefer productive, academically engaged students who are making passing grades in while they are in school. The parents could have permitted their children to engage in other things, especially on a Saturday morning, but it speaks to their support when they as parents decided to support their children attending a program such as Saturday Academy. The review of the literature in Chapter 2 consistently stresses the importance of parent engagement, something that this group of parents somewhat exemplified.

*Answering Research Question Three: How do students, teachers, and parents perceive Saturday Academy influences peer engagement?* When students completed their questionnaires most stated that their closest friends did not attend the Academy, but they were able to make new friends among those who did attend. The influence of peers in adolescence is strong. One of the participants acknowledged this and confirmed it by explaining that if their closest friends had attended the Academy with them, they would constantly be in trouble with their teachers.

The review of literature revealed how students who befriend students who are high school dropouts are likely to become high school dropouts, and vice versa ("Extra Curricular Activities May Be the Glue that Keeps Students in School", 2008). Saturday Academy participants seemed to believe that because their peers who attended the Academy with them were not their closest friends, they did not have as much influence over them. However, it was observed that once a Saturday Academy student began to misbehave, be disruptive, or to the

other extreme, responded positively, it caused the entire group to do the same. Students may begin to join in with the misconduct or conversely the good behaviors of their peers.

The second indicator of peer engagement was whether or not friends planned to attend a four-year college. Student participants were asked on their survey if they had plans for college, and like their parents, they all agreed that they plan to attend college. Many participants expressed that they were unsure about whether or not their friends were going, but they were hopeful for themselves. Teachers of Saturday Academy did not feel as though they explored the option of college during Saturday Academy as much as was needed. “However, at least a seed has been planted in the subconscious to pursue a higher education.” Teachers saw positive effects in regard to peer engagement. Teachers felt that they observed a good amount of peer engagement during instruction in Saturday Academy.

*Answering Research Question Four: Does student attendance, discipline, test scores, and grades align with their perception of them?* The answer to this question is “no”. Students were surveyed and interviewed about their discipline, test scores, and grades and for the most part their answers were vastly different from the data that was provided by their school. The students seem to be able to recognize that their attendance, discipline, test scores, and grades are all important to their success in school, which may be the reason why they gave responses that did not align with the information provided by Water Valley Middle School.

### **Evaluation of the Program**

The first indicator for evaluating the effectiveness of the program was student engagement, both with the program and with school in general. When the participants were asked how they felt about attending Saturday Academy, with the exception of one, they liked Saturday Academy. This, in turn, was displayed in their high level of engagement with the

various experiences that may not have otherwise been present. Based on the number of discipline incidents that occurred in regular school, it could be the case that students were not as engaged in regular school as they were in Saturday Academy and perhaps engagement in regular school improved because students gained skills that could assist them in their regular classes.

There are a number of positive elements that the Saturday Academy offers. It exposes children to different activities to which they might otherwise not be exposed. The Academy provides young people with constructive activity and provides regular field trips. Students learn new skills that they can apply in their regular classroom, and students' develop social skills when they receive small group instruction that gives them the opportunity to build relationships with teachers. Although Saturday Academy has many good elements, it does not appear to have reached the goal of high achievement for all. One of the obstacles is that a very small number of students participate. But, those who participated in the study perceived the Academy as a place where students come and get assistance with their class work. Some of the parents of the participants also believed, as conveyed in PPQ, that the Academy offers assistance with regular class work as well.

Saturday Academy is an excellent concept. If it does not achieve any other goal, it is successful in reaching some students who are at risk and providing an alternative to being unproductive on a Saturday morning. Saturday Academy gives students something positive to do as opposed to being exposed to the negative influences that are taking place in their neighborhoods. The Saturday Academy supports student engagement. Students are spending time productively. The next focus for Water Valley Middle School's teachers and leaders needs to be on how to get more students involved and how to increase parental engagement.

**Recommendations**

The results of this study led to recommendations in five categories that could improve Saturday Academy or any intervention for at-risk African American students in a similar environment. These categories are (a) student engagement, (b) parental engagement, (c) peer engagement, (d) college preparation activities, and (e) tutoring. The recommendations are as follows.

**Student engagement.** One aspect of student engagement is when students are participating in extracurricular activities. The students at Water Valley Middle School did not have many extracurricular activities to choose from, and the ones they had could have been more appealing. The district and school may benefit from extracurricular activities that the student body at Water Valley enjoys and are willing to participate in. The enrollment in extracurricular activities needs to be increased. Perhaps if information was provided about these clubs and activities to the Saturday Academy participants, it would be beneficial. Research has shown that students who participate in extracurricular activities achieve higher academically.

**Parent engagement.** Research has established that parental engagement is fundamental to academic success. The district has to seek ways to increase parental engagement in supporting student academics. One way in which Saturday Academy can increase parental engagement is by communicating regularly with parents. For example, prior to the first day of Academy, teachers could set up a meeting with parents and provide information about the Academy and solicit parents for help. It may also be possible to survey parents a couple of times during the school year to find out parents' views on the Saturday Academy. Providing parents with regular progress reports and scheduling parent teacher meetings throughout the school year may be



helpful. In every way possible, parents should be provided with as many opportunities as possible to be engaged with their students' school life.

**Peer engagement.** It might be ideal to start some peer-to-peer programs such as peer tutoring and peer mentoring. Besides the influence of family, peers have a great influence on one another. Most student participants expressed in their questionnaires that if their friends had participated along with them it would have negatively affected their behavior. Therefore, it would be beneficial to work on perfecting social skills during Saturday Academy time. Saturday Academy could involve all students, especially older students who could serve as role models. Saturday Academy could perform a service project for an elementary school. The influence that peers have on one another could be used in various ways to engage students.

**College preparation activities.** College planning should be included in Saturday Academy. When students were asked about their MAP scores and GPA, their responses were inaccurate—school records contradicted their perceptions. In planning for college, student participants should be made aware of their MAP scores and GPA and it should be explained to students how these components affect attending college. Participants should be informed about college planning, detailing the requirement for college, how to prepare for college (e.g., ACT or SAT practice exams), and how to pay for college.

These four categories of recommendations (student engagement, parent engagement, peer engagement, and college preparation activities) were also used, when missing, as indicators for identifying at-risk students. Indicators that, when missing, identify at-risk students can also be used to help at-risk students when they are present. While each category is addressed somewhat in the current Saturday Academy program, addressing these categories further could strengthen the program considerably at little cost.

**Tutoring.** Last, the Eagle Bill School District may benefit from tutoring time during the Saturday Academy. Tutoring was something that both students and parents expected, and it is a tool that can increase student achievement. Eagle Bill School District may benefit by mandating Saturday Academy for students who are the lowest academically in the same way that summer school is mandated for those students who are too far behind to be promoted to the next grade. Another possible use for the Saturday Academy may benefit at-risk students by offering classes to those who are falling behind in credits. These classes could be similar to correspondence classes and offer credit at the time of completion. Lastly, the district might want to examine perceptions of students who have participated in the Saturday Academy for more than one year.

### **Implications for Educators**

The study data has implications for counselors, teachers, and school administrators working with at-risk African American students. There are innumerable opportunities to develop individual and systematic interventions, which can be productive for school districts. These interventions are supported by the findings of this study—student engagement, parental involvement, peer engagement, and college preparation activities are important factors for student achievement.

### **Suggestions for Additional Research**

This study explored parent, student, and teacher perceptions of an intervention for at-risk students called Saturday Academy. Because of this research, recommendations for future study have emerged involving parents, classroom teachers, and peer engagement, beyond the scope of this study. More longitudinal research is recommended. It may be beneficial for Eagle Bill School District Valley School District to study this cohort of students for the duration of their school years within the school district. Changes in the students over time could be examined.

Parents have a strong influence when they are engaged in their child's education.

Questions for parents that could reveal to educators a successful intervention for at-risk students could include the following: (a) Why did you choose to support your child attending a program on a Saturday? (b) What do you believe will be the best way for the school to assist your child academically? (c) How do you support your child's education? and (d) How can the school help you to help your child be successful in school?

Classroom teachers could also contribute to making a successful intervention for at-risk students. Some of the questions for classroom teachers could include the following: (a) What do you believe to be the best way to help at-risk students achieve? (b) What kind of professional development do you feel is necessary to prepare teachers to instruct at-risk students? (c) What other kind of support do you need to instruct at-risk students? and (d) Is there adequate planning and collaboration for teachers who instruct at-risk students?

Students are key to the success of any intervention, so it would be valuable to get their insight. Some of the questions for students could include the following: (a) How do your peers influence you at school? (b) Who influences you the most, your peers or family? (c) Do you want the same grades as your peer group? and (d) What type of program would you participate in if you need some help with your academics?

None of the student participants from this study had an Individual Education Plan (IEP). Therefore, another recommendation for future research would be to develop an intervention that addresses the needs of students who have IEPs through the Special School District. Many of these students are at risk as well, and there are a large number of African American students who have IEPs.

**Conclusion**

At-risk students, especially African American students, are expected to perform at the same level as children who have been afforded the best that public education has to offer. This is an unrealistic expectation that needs to be re-examined. Most school districts are taking a one-size-fits-all approach in helping all children perform at the same level. All students are required to attend school, but not all students are given the same opportunities to learn. The focus of education should be on the way to increase achievement for all students.

Teachers all over the nation must be patient with and creative in their approach to at-risk students. Although this study included students who were not failing in all academic areas, at-risk students are likely to be failing in all academic areas, probably is not the norm for all at-risk students. In this study students voluntarily participated in the intervention program, and their at-risk factors varied in numbers and severity. Districts who are struggling with educating at-risk students may benefit by observing districts that are increasing achievement among at-risk students to see what they are doing. At-risk students should be afforded an equal opportunity to be educated and their teachers should be supported in educating them.

In conclusion, the findings involving the perceptions of parents, teachers, and students revealed important information about the Eagle Bill School District Saturday Academy that could be generalized to other at-risk student interventions. Perceptions are important because this program is voluntary, so students and parents must perceive it is effective and beneficial before they will commit to the program. As a result, at-risk students, who are mostly African American, will benefit from improvement in an intervention that is designed to increase achievement.

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**Appendix A**

**Student Survey (SS)**

1. I attended Saturday Academy

- Every Session
- Most Sessions
- Half of the sessions
- I was absent more than half of the sessions

2. I learned a lot in Saturday Academy

- Yes
- No
- Other

What was the most important thing you learned?

3. The teachers really seemed to care if I learned.

- Yes
- No
- Other

5. My parent/s supported me attending the Saturday Academy

Yes

No

Other

6. My friends encouraged me to attend Saturday Academy

Yes

No

Sometimes

Other

7. My discipline record includes:

More than 5 referrals this school year

3-5 referrals this school year

1-3 referrals this school year

No referrals

8. My G.P.A. is

4.0-3.0

2.9-2.0

1.9 or below

Other

9. My grades have improved because of Saturday Academy.

yes

no

maybe

Please explain your answer.

10. My previous Map Scores were

Advanced

Proficient

Nearing Proficiency

Basic

Below Basic

Don't remember

11. I think Saturday Academy helps kids like me do better in school.

yes

no

12. After high school, I plan to

go to college

get a job



get training for a job

I don't think I will finish high school

13. Attending Saturday Academy was good for me.

yes

no

unsure

Please explain your answer.

13. Saturday Academy has changed the way I act in school.

yes

no

maybe

14. I liked going to Saturday Academy.

yes

no

sometimes

**Appendix B**

**Student Perception Interview Questionnaire (SPIQ)**

1. What were you expecting from Saturday Academy?
2. Did you enjoy the learning activities that were provided through Saturday Academy?
3. How was your relationship with your Saturday Academy teachers?
4. Did your parent allow you the choice to participate in Saturday Academy? How did they support you after you enrolled?
5. Did your peers encourage you, discourage you or offered no input about you attending Saturday Academy?
6. Do you plan to attend college?
7. What is your academic goal for the next school year?
8. Did you feel challenged by the learning activities provided by Saturday Academy?
9. What would you change about Saturday Academy?
10. What was great about Saturday Academy?

**Appendix C**

**Parent Perception Questionnaire (PPQ)**

1. What were you expecting from Saturday Academy?
2. Have you seen improvement in your child's academics since they enrolled in Saturday Academy?
3. What do you like about Saturday Academy?
4. Why did you choose to support you child attending Saturday Academy?
5. Are your intentions for your child to attend college?
6. What would you change about Saturday Academy?
7. Does your child seem genuinely interested in attending Saturday Academy?
8. How involved are you in your child's schooling?
9. Do you feel as though your child's needs are being met in Saturday Academy?
10. If invited to participated again next school year, will you encourage your child to participate again?

**Appendix D**

**Teacher Perception Interview Questionnaire (TPIQ)**

1. Do you feel like Saturday Academy is meeting the expectations that were set out from the beginning?
2. What can be done during Saturday Academy to increase student achievement?
3. What primary need exists for at risk students?
4. What is the difficulty of meeting these needs?
5. Are you experiencing any behavior problems?
6. To what extent, if any, do you receive parental engagement?
7. Is there any collaboration between you and the other Saturday Academy teachers?
8. Do students seem to be motivated by their peers who are enrolled in the program with them?
9. How would you describe student engagement?
10. Do you think Saturday Academy is the answer for African American students who are failing academically?

**Vitae**

Melody Witherspoon is native of Saint Louis, Missouri where she is an In School Suspension teacher. She holds a Bachelor of Science Degree in Elementary Education from Harris Stowe State College in Saint Louis, Missouri. She holds a Master of Arts in Educational Administration from Lindenwood University in Saint Charles, Missouri. She holds certifications for both teaching and administration. In her career she has taught both elementary and middle school students, she has been a mentor, and a tutor. Melody also has been both a summer camp counselor and a director at Mathews Dickey Boys and Girls Club of Saint Louis, Missouri. Melody has worked with many children throughout the Saint Louis Metropolitan area and looks forward to continuing this work.