**The Perceived Impact of School-Based Mentorship on the Overall High School Experience of Students Identified as At-Risk in an Urban Setting**

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**Abstract**

The purpose of this qualitative research study was to explore how both high school students and mentors perceived that at school-based mentorship program impacted the school career for students identified as at-risk within School District X located in a Midwest metropolitan area. Archival interview data was used because it allowed the researcher to examine stories and perceptions through responsive interviews. Specific areas of research included commonalities between participants and how the commonalities impacted the building of the relationship, goals tied to the relationship, time spent engaged in activities in the relationship, and overall perceptions of the impact of the relationship.

The following research questions were used to guide the study:

1. How do students identified as being at-risk perceive their relationship with school-based mentors impact their overall high school experience?

2. How do school-based mentors perceive their relationship with students identified as being at-risk impact their overall high school experience?

Results from the current study support a review of the available literature focusing on mentor and mentee perceptions associated with mentorship programs and its impact on school experiences. Findings indicate mentees find meaning in situations in which mentors are able to meet the mentee's emotional need of being a listening ear. The current study would suggest, when mentors understand the needs of students at-risk for academic failure oftentimes extends beyond the school day, successful connections are possible.

## Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to my husband, Doyle, who has been a constant support. He called me Dr. King, long before earning the title. Thank you for calling those things which are not as though they are (Romans 4:17).

A number of years ago, my mom gave a plaque that states, "She believed she could, and so she did!" Thank you, mom, for always believing in me and reminding me I am a strong black woman.

I also want to dedicate this dissertation to my daughter, Jocelynn. Twenty-seven years ago, your birth saved my life. None of this would be possible without you. You stayed in the center of the ring with me, and I thank you for always being engaged.

My grandmother, Dorothy Huey, was always a huge supporter in my life. I am thankful for her wisdom and encouragement she always provided to me.

Finally, in 1954 my father, Staten Heard, was the first African American student to integrate Major Hudson Elementary in the Kansas City, Kansas Public School District as a kindergartener after the Brown v. Board of Education decision in Topeka, Kansas. Over the years, he has shared many stories focused on the struggles associated with moving from a system "separate but equal" to one of inclusion. Many of these stories highlight how, despite the strides taken, we still have a long way to go. This work is also dedicated to my father and to those that fought then and who fight now for those that are marginalized in our educational system with the goal the learning for *all* truly means ALL.

**Acknowledgements**

I would like to express my sincere gratitude to my major advisor Dr. Harold Frye for your guidance, encouragement, phone calls and frequent visits to my office just to keep me on track. I would not have made it to the end without you pushing me along the way. Special thanks to Dr. Li Chen Bouck, my research analyst, for your patience as I worked to get it right – even if it took me multiple drafts. Dr. Verneda Edwards and Dr. Elizabeth Heide, thank you both for serving on my committee. Both of you hold a special place in my life and I am honored to have shared this process with you. Finally, thank you to my friends and family who have been my biggest cheerleaders over the last several years. If I made a list of all those that stood in the gap and prayed for me, I would double the number of pages in this dissertation. I am blessed to have each and every one of you in my life!

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# Chapter 1

## Introduction

Education has commonly been seen as the path to the middle class for those that are struggling in impoverished situations, one of several critical characteristics tied to the profile of at-risk students (Hudley, 2013). The National Center for Education Statistics (1992) identified several variables associated with at-risk students including basic demographic characteristics, family and personal background characteristics, parental involvement, academic history, behavioral factors, teacher perceptions, and the characteristics of the school setting. For the educational institutions that serve the families and students in these situations, the challenge becomes providing a well-rounded education which meets the standard of closing the achievement gap between those identified at-risk of academic failure and those on track to academic success (Garcia & Weiss, 2017). Traditionally, the focus has been on the quality of the educator in the classroom setting as well as the educational opportunities available to students, leadership at the school and district level, and ways to engage parents in the educational process (Ferlazzo, 2014).

Another growing response to mediating the effects associated with at-risk students involves the inclusion of school-based mentoring programs designed to intentionally connect at-risk students and caring mentors with the goal of positively impacting attendance and behavior choices, leading to increased academic performance (School-Based Mentoring, n.d.). Much like the strategies mentioned earlier, there is research that points to school-based mentoring as a vehicle for positively impacting student achievement. A 2007 study of Big Brothers Big Sisters school-based mentoring model

found positive evidence of statistically significant impacting primarily on school-related attitudes, performance, and behavior (Herrera, Grossman, Kauh, Feldman, & McMaken, 2007). The U.S. Department of Education's Student Mentoring Program (2009) documented statistically significant improvements for those students at-risk for school failure mentored compared to the control group as measured by many outcomes including perceived academic efficacy, truancy, and overall attendance. The Stand Together Foundation (2017), a grassroots organization developed to build partnerships other organizations with the goal of removing barriers for people in poverty so that they can realize their potential, shared, frequently, mentorship is the catalyst for growth for those at-risk students being mentored with research to support the growth. Results show that at-risk girls were more likely to be confident in their academic performance (Stand Together, 2017). Additionally, at-risk boys that were mentored were less likely to develop negative behavior and less likely to suffer from negative peer pressure and anxiety (Stand Together, 2017). Overall, mentoring an at-risk student increased the student's likelihood of attending college by 50%, 46% less likely to use drugs, and 27% less likely to use alcohol (Stand Together, 2017). It is with the research mentioned above focused on school-based mentoring programs for at-risk students, that additional research focused on the impact of school-based mentorship programs on the overall high school experience becomes so important.

**Background**

To protect the identity of the specific school district featured in this study the district is referred to as School District X. School District X is located in the heart of a large, Midwest metropolitan area. This school district has one early childhood center,

four elementary schools, one middle school (6-8 grade), one high school (9-12 grade), and an alternative school that serves grades 6-12.

Table 1 shows the demographic breakdown for School District X. The total enrollment ending as of December 2018 for School District X was 2,370.9, though this number is ever-changing as School District X has a 28% transient population ([redacted] Department of Education, 2018). Sixty-one and six hundredth percent of the entire student population are African American. The table also indicates that 73.6% of students enrolled district-wide is economically disadvantaged as identified through the National School Lunch Program. Overall, 88.7% of students are meeting the states' required attendance expectations of 90%.

Table 1

*Demographics of School District X*

| | B | W | H | Other | EconDis | SpEd | Attend |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| *N* | 1,646 | 531 | 233 | 263 | 1746.5 | 409 | 2370.9 |
| *%* | 61.6 | 19.9 | 8.7 | 9.8 | 73.6 | | 88.7 |

*Note. B = Black; W = White; H = Hispanic; Other = All other races/ethnic groups; EconDis = Economically Disadvantage, SpEd = Special Education Diagnosis, Attend = Attendance*

*Adapted from Data and Reports by [redacted] Department of Education, 2018, Retrieved from https://[redacted]/home.aspx*

Driven by student data tied to potential challenges associated with at-risk status (grades below C in a core content area, more than one major discipline referral, and attendance rate below 90%), School District X has worked to develop programming that supports students leading to a successful school career. The school district provides several school-within-a-school programs designed to support students at risk of academic

failure. These programs include an alternative path to graduation and a long-term suspension program that allows students to stay connected to their academic work while on a long-term suspension. Additional social workers were hired to support some of the complex challenges associated with school attendance and academic success.

In coordination with area community agencies, School District X also sought to implement a school-based mentoring program. The goal of the program was to have a positive impact on attendance with the thought that the by-product of improved attendance was positively impacting grades in core content areas and behavior choices made when interacting with peers and adults. Students identified as at-risk because of grades below a C in core content areas, attendance rates below the required 90% mark, and more than one documented major behavior referral were identified and assigned a school-based mentor. Mentors are in large part volunteer community members that committed themselves to support students with a minimum of one hour a week of face to face contact with a student. Mentors also participate in a training session which provides strategies for building relationships with students. Mentors are given guidelines around the possible areas of focus during the weekly meeting with a required component around reviewing the students' attendance rate. Mentors are taught how to engage with students around academic and behavioral needs. Both mentors and student mentees meet regularly to ensure all are having their needs met.

**Statement of the Problem**

Arguably one of the most significant educational problems in the U.S. lies in the fact that the achievement of students at-risk for academic failure lags behind those students not identified as being at-risk for academic failure (Lynch, 2017). Though a

significant amount of research has been conducted on the subject, experts continue to grapple with concrete, school-based interventions that mediates the achievement gap in a positive way (Garcia & Weiss, 2017). A qualitative study investigating the perceived impact of the mentor and student relationships on the overall high school career could provide additional insight into the effectiveness of such programs.

**Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore how both high school students and mentors perceive school-based mentorship programs impact the school career for students identified as at-risk within the School District X located in a Midwest metropolitan area.

**Significance of the Study**

This study contributes to research examining the role of school-based mentorship programs in students' high school career, especially the students identified as at-risk for academic failure. In recent years there has been a call for additional research focused on the tie between school-based mentorship programs and the overall high school experience leading to positive outcomes for students (Gordon, Downey, & Bangert, 2013). Additionally, to fully understand the insights of the individuals involved, Bell (2017) suggests that interviews be included as part of the research process. This study sought to extend this work by examining school-based mentorship in an urban setting by exploring the student and teacher perceptions of the impact of mentorship on the overall high school experience. Results of this study may also be used to examine the possibility of including school-based mentorship as a part of a comprehensive plan with a focus on increasing the likelihood of at-risk students to having a positive high school experience,

as defined by the researcher, to include opportunities to find academic and relational success both during the school day as well as in the community or other social settings.

**Delimitations**

Simon (2011) defines delimitations as "those characteristics that limit the scope and define the boundaries of your study" (p. 2). High school participants were limited to those in the tenth through the twelfth grades that have at least one year of experience in the school-based mentorship program. This allows the research to glean information from students that have an understanding of how high school works after having spent a year as a high school freshman. This is important when potentially using perceptions to make programming decisions for the whole. Interviews for all participants were limited to one interview session during the 2018-2019 school year with a follow-up session to ask clarifying questions if needed. Aside from the delimitation associated with the constraints around the interview session, there are no other delimitations connected with mentor participation. This will allow the research to gain the most authentic response to the questions asked. The method of data collection was limited to interviews conducted in person and via phone call. The sample included ten high school students identified as being at-risk who had previous experience with the school-based mentorship program and five mentors.

**Assumptions**

The researcher made two assumptions. The first assumption was that participants understood the interview questions correctly. The second assumption was that participants answered the interview questions to the best of their knowledge and memory.

## Research Questions

The following research questions were used to guide the study:

**RQ1.** How do students identified as being at-risk perceive their relationship with school-based mentors impact their overall high school experience?

**RQ2.** How do school-based mentors perceive their relationship with students identified as being at-risk impact their overall high school experience?

## Definition of Terms

**Achievement gap.** The "achievement gap" in education refers to the disparity in academic performance between groups of students. The achievement gap shows up in grades, standardized test scores, course selection, dropout rates, and college completion rates, among other success measures (Ansell, 2011, n.p.).

**At-risk students.** National Center for Education Statistics (1992) defines at-risk students as students who are likely to fail with failure equating to dropping out of school before high school graduation.

**Dignified housing.** Vocabulary.com (n.d.) defines dignified as "self-respecting and worthy." Dignified housing is housing that is self-respecting and worthy to the average person.

**Follow-up questions.** Follow-up questions allow the researcher to explore the interviewee's answers to gain more depth and detail, seek clarification, and ask for examples (Rubin & Rubin, 2005).

**High-poverty school.** National Center for Education Statistics (2018) defines a high-poverty school as one where more than 75% of the students are eligible for free and reduced lunch.

**Jim Crow.** Jim Crow refers to a series of discriminatory laws and measures that discriminated against African Americans (Vocabulary.com, n.d.).

**Main questions.** Rubin and Rubin (2005) define the main questions as questions that "provide the scaffolding of the interview. They ensure that the research question is answered from the perspective of the conversational partner" (p. 116). Usually, the interviewer only asks one central question and no more than a handful.

**Probes.** Probes are defined as "questions, comments, and gestures used by the interviewer to help manage the conversation" (Rubin & Rubin, 2005, p. 119).

**Parent involvement.** McNeal (2014) defines parent involvement in the broad sense as any action taken by a parent that can theoretically be expected to improve student performance or behavior. It is further defined as further define as a form of social capital grounded in trust, obligation, or reciprocity involving three domains: parent-child, parent-school, and parent-parent relations.

**School-based mentoring.** The National Mentoring Resource Center (n.d.) defines school-based mentoring as a school-based intervention designed for at-risk students that aims to improve academic performance, promote school connectedness, and life satisfaction while decreasing disciplinary actions.

**Suburban school district.** National Center for Educational Statistics (1992) defines suburban school district as a territory outside a principal city and inside an urbanized area.

**Urban school district.** Urban School District refers to schools in metropolitan communities that typically are diverse, characterized by large enrollments and complexity, many struggling with growth (Mrdwyer32, 2016).

**White flight.** White flight is defined as the movement of white city-dwellers to the suburbs to escape the influx of minorities (Maceo, 2017).

## Organization of the Study

Chapter 1 included the introduction, a statement of the problem, and background information focused on at-risk students and mentorships as a way of mediating the potentially negative impact of those at-risk of school failure. The purpose and significance of the study were also presented. Research questions and specific terms related to the study were introduced. Chapter 2 provides a literature review which included characteristics of at-risk students, common intervention utilized and school-based mentorship programs as a way of supporting at-risk students. Chapter 3 focuses on research design, sample, instrumentation, and data collection procedures. Chapter 4 focuses on the results and analysis of the data. Chapter 5 offers major findings, implications, and recommendations for future research.

# Chapter 2

## Review of the Literature

### Introduction

The National Center for Educational Statistics (1992), which is "the primary federal entity for collecting, analyzing and reporting data related to education in the United States and other nations" (p. 3); conducted research focused on the characteristics of students identified as at-risk for academic failure in a K-12 institution. Out of this work, sponsored by the U.S. Department of Education came seven sets of variables that were examined including: basic demographic characteristics (gender, race/ethnicity, socioeconomic status), family and personal background characteristics, amount of parental involvement in the student's education, the student's academic history, student behavior factors, teacher perceptions of the student, and the characteristics of the student's school (The National Center for Educational Statistics, 1992). The six supporting factors were examined through the lens of three primary demographic variables, including the student's gender, race-ethnicity, and socioeconomic status. This chapter seeks to explore factors related to at-risk identification and in particular, those related to race/ethnicity, socioeconomic status, and gender.

Additional thought was given to literature associated with future prospects for students identified at-risk if they were not successful with their K-12 educational pursuits, and broad-based interventions used to support students identified as at risk. In-depth attention was given to literature focused on school-based mentorships as a way of supporting students identified as at-risk and the perceived effectiveness of these programs.

## Characteristics of At-Risk Students

**Basic demographics.** Though characteristics associated with students identified as at-risk tends to be fluid and often changes with societal needs and legislation changes (Herr, 1989), it is commonly noted that issues associated with basic demographics, and in particular socioeconomic status, are seen as indicators related to the identification of students at-risk for academic failure (Chaplin & Hannaway, 1996). Students from families living in impoverished homes frequently struggle with having their basic needs met. Dignified housing and all of the components necessary for the adequate maintenance of the housing is often lacking. Utilities and other basic needs are a source of instability, which has an impact on the state of mind when entering school (Weers, 2012). Frequently students living in poverty reside in communities that lead to exposure and participation in inappropriate experiences in the form of violence and crime, leading to community instability. These living conditions can manifest itself in attendance challenges and being poorly prepared for the academic demands of the coursework, leading to a more significant educational divide (Weers, 2012).

In recent years there has been a tremendous amount of research focused on Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACE) and the impact on educational performance (Turner, 2016). Research initially conducted from 1995-1997 by Kaiser Permanente and the Center for Disease Control and Prevention focused on the relationship between abuse, neglect and household challenges and later health risk behavior and disease in adulthood (Perez, Wesley, Piquero, & Baglivio, 2016). The initial research has developed into an increased understanding around how adverse childhood experiences impact student birth to 18 both academically and social emotionally (Dube, 2018). Recently, experiences of

poverty have been added to those factors because of the known adverse impact associated with lack of basic resources (Collins et al., 2010; Vassar, 2011). This absence of financial resources manifests itself in poor health, behavior problems related to academic skill gaps and trigger responses in reaction to prior adverse experiences and overall lack of academic achievement.

If poverty is commonly recognized as one of the top characteristics associated with students identified at-risk for academic failure, race/ethnicity stands side by side with poverty (Darling-Hammond, 1998). Our United States history provides evidence to many factors related to race/ethnicity discrimination and subsequent identification of at-risk for academic failure. Racial segregation in the United States is defined as the separation of access to facilities, services, and opportunities (New World Encyclopedia, 2019.). Its roots extend back to the reconstruction in the south in the mid to late 1800 after the Civil War (Hansan, 2011). Originally laws such as the Reconstruction Act of 1866 and the associated amendments to the United States Constitution, as well as the Civil Rights Act of 1875, were all designed to in attempt to level the playing field between Caucasians and newly freed African Americans (History, n.d.; Longley, 2018). During this time, African Americans began advocating for schools for their children, but they did not demand racially integrated schools. For this reason, almost all of the schools created were segregated (Sandifer & Renfer, 2003). As the North lost interest in reconstruction efforts and federal troops were withdrawn from the south, Jim Crow laws, grounded in the idea of separate but equal, began taking root in the south (Brown & Steniford, 2008; History.com, 2018). By 1910, segregation was fully established across the country in some form or fashion (Anderson, 2016).

With the support of the 1896 United States Supreme Court Plessy v. Ferguson decision upholding the constitutionality of separate but equal, Jim Crow laws institutionalized among other things educational disadvantages for African Americans (Duignan, n.d.; Library of Congress, n.d.). Though Jim Crow laws of the South legalized separate, but equal in an overt fashion, Northern states operated in a more covert, matter-of-fact way (Brown & Steniford, 2008). This fact manifested itself in inferior and underfunded facilities and access. Fewer African American children were enrolled in school, usually, because their help was needed either on the farm or to make a financial contribution to the household (Brooker, n.d.). Those that stayed in school tended to drop out by fourth grade to go into the workforce (Brooker. n.d.). Overall there were not as many public schools available to African American children (Brooker, n.d.). Schools designated for African American children tended to be in ill-repair, lacked many of the basic necessities (i.e., desks and chairs), and were overcrowded (Brown & Steniford, 2008; Irons, n.d.). Textbooks and other instructional material tended to be hand-me-downs, and teachers were less educated as compared to their Caucasian counterparts (Brown & Steniford, 2008; Irons, n.d.).

These conditions represented the education African Americans received with the implied prospects, or lack thereof, as a result of the education provided until Brown v. Board of Education in 1954. This landmark United States Supreme Court decision declared state laws establishing separate public schools for African Americans and Caucasian children to be unconstitutional (Pruitt, 2018). In the immediate aftermath, it was assumed this decision would immediately correct the wrongs of this overt and covert

thinking. Unfortunately, it was, and continues to be, much more complicated than merely following the law with *all due speed* (Pruitt, 2018).

One of the biggest challenges associated with desegregation involved the neighborhood in which families live. Most families lived in racially segregated communities. White flight, defined as the outmigration of Caucasian residents from inner cities to the suburbs, has been cited as a principle reason for racially segregated communities (Haines, n.d.) and has its roots as far back as the Great Migration during the 1930s (Maceo, 2017). During this period, in an effort to be freed of the American "apartheid system" of the Jim Crow south, African Americans began moving to liberal areas in the north. As African Americans moved into these areas, to protect the property assets, Caucasians moved to other predominantly Caucasian communities (Maceo, 2017). Redlining, commonly known as the practice of refusing to lend money or extend credit to borrowers in specific areas through the 1960s, lead to segregated neighborhoods (Jan, 2018). Although this practice was outlawed with the passing of the Fair Housing Act in 1968, many major cities continued to suffer from the economic and racially residential segregated by-product of redlining. Because the geographic location of the residence determines school attendance, the by-product of segregated neighborhoods is segregated schools. Busing was seen as one way of addressing challenges associated with desegregation (Ramsey, 2017). Unfortunately, busing was not seen as a viable option for both African Americans and Caucasians integrating each community (Ramsey, 2017).

Although it is a commonly agreed-upon fact that the best education for all children is one that allows all race and ethnic groups to learn together, approximately 75% of African American children attend racially segregated schools nationally (Tatum,

2017). The original intent of *Brown v. Board of Education* was to move away from the segregation of children based on race recognizing the best education for all is one that is inclusive. The legal ruling delivered by Chief Justice Warren (*Brown v. Board of Education*, 1954) held:

> Segregation of white and [minority] children in public schools has a detrimental effect upon the [minority] children. The impact is greater when it has the sanction of the law for the policy of separating the races is usually interpreted as denoting the inferiority of the [minority] group . . . Segregation with the sanction of law, therefore, has a tendency to (retard) the educational and mental development of [minority] children and to deprive them of some of the benefits they would receive in a racial(ly) integrated system. (n.p.)

Unfortunately, with an increased focus on standardized testing, less emphasis was placed on desegregation (Ramsey, 2017). Though the Census Bureau reports the percentage of African Americans and Caucasians obtaining a high school diploma are nearly equal with 85% and 89% respectively, overall academic achievement rates on standardized test for African Americans continue to lag behind Caucasians. An analysis of 2015 Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT) scores indicates among the top scores – those between a 750 and 800 – 60% were Asian, 33% White, 5% Hispanic/Latino and 2% Black (Reeves & Halikias, 2017). Among those scoring between 300 and 350, 37% are Hispanic/Latino, 35% Black, 21% White, and 6% Asian (Reeves & Halikias, 2017). Additionally, Caucasians, particularly from affluent families, finish college at much higher rates as compared to African Americans. The lack of college education has a direct impact on the median income for African American families (Brownstein, 2014).

Table 2

*Analysis of the 2015 Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT)*

| | W | B | H/L | A |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 300 - 350 | 21% | 35% | 37% | 6% |
| 750 - 800 | 33% | 5% | 2% | 60% |

*Note: W = White; B = Black; H/L = Hispanic/Latino; A = Asian Adapted from Data and Reports by Race Gaps in SAT, 2018, Retrieved from https://www.brookings.edu/research/race-gaps-in-sat-scores-highlight-inequality-and-hinder-upward-mobility/*

Gender provides the third prong when examining students identified as at-risk in the K-12 setting as it relates to basic demographics. When considering the role of gender, one must look in the context of gender and behavior challenges leading to the separation of students from their academic needs via suspension. Data related to discipline and out of school suspension as a vehicle for addressing the behavior challenges are clear and convincing, notably when adding in race/ethnicity. African American males are disciplined and punished disproportionally more than any other group (Howard, 2018). The U.S. Department of Education's Office of Civil Rights found that African American males are three times more likely to be suspended or expelled as compared to their Caucasian counterparts (Loveless, 2017). The UCLA Civil Rights Project released a national study in February 2018 focused on identifying those states which had the most striking data tied to unequal school discipline. States like Mississippi, South Carolina, Delaware, and Missouri were cited. In the state of Missouri, the data showed that elementary schools suspended 14% of African American students during the 2011-12 school year compared with 1.8% of Caucasian students.

The practice of suspending at disproportional rates has a significant impact on a male student and in particular an African American student's ability to navigate the K-12 public school system successfully. Infractions in the school setting can lead a student to referrals to the local justice system leading to the involvement of the local police, the arrest of minors, and filing of criminal charges (Howard, 2018). Additionally, Howard (2018) shared that school arrest can have a lifelong impact leading to an adverse effect on graduation rates and the potential of going through life with the much needed high school diploma. The Alliance for Excellent Education (2013), a Washington D.C. based national policy and advocacy organization, reported 56% of federal inmates, 67% of inmates at the state level, and 69% in local jails lack a high school diploma. Data shows that the impact can be measured long before graduation. Schools with high suspension rates have shown to have lower mean scores on state achievement test as compared to schools with lower suspension rates (Noltemeyer & Ward, 2015). In a recent study Ginsburg, Jordan, & Chang (2014) found that missing three days of school in the month before taking the National Assessment of Educational Progress in the fourth grade rendered scores a full grade level lower in reading on the assessment.

**Family and personal background characteristics.** Beyond socioeconomic status, race/ethnicity and gender, other family and personal background factors have been known to have an impact on student identification of at-risk status. Factors such as single versus two-parent families have been considered. Research conducted explicitly focused on the impact of children from intact or two-parent families and non-intact or single-parent families in urban settings indicated children from intact-families perform significantly higher as compared to children from non-intact families in the areas of

attendance, mathematics, social behavior and work/study habits (Gilner, 1988; Siegel, 1988). Additionally, there is a significant body of research that points to the fact that African American males raised in single-parent households tend to perform more poorly academically, are more likely to drop out of school, experience emotional difficulties, and struggle to attain self-sufficiency (Roberts, 2013). Researchers have also argued that African American males from single-parent households are more vulnerable to delinquent acts than those of two-parent households leading to possible incarceration or death (Roberts, 2013). When examined through the lens of special education placement, students coming from single-parent households were more likely to be negatively affected by the home environment and have a higher probability of academic deficits, leading to special education placement (Cook, 2017).

**Amount of parental involvement.** The influence of parent involvement on a student's academic success is a frequently debated ingredient when examining at- risk identification. One must look at this variable through the lens of impact on academic performance and reasons for lack of parent involvement. In a broad sense, students with a supportive, two-parent family are 52% more likely to enjoy school and produce documented academic achievement through good grades as compared to parents that are disconnected with school (Pinantoan, 2016). When looking at parent involvement among African Americans in particular, a meta-analysis conducted by Jeynes in 2007 indicated parental involvement was statistically related to increased student achievement for African American students (McNeal, 2014). Even more telling is the tie between parental involvement and academic achievement exist over and above the impact of the child's intelligence (Topor, Keane, Shelton, & Calkins, 2010).

When examining the tie between at-risk identification and parent involvement, one must not just consider the bottom line, data, but the reasons parents might choose to disconnect from the school. James (2008) found that the parents' race/ethnicity, education level, socioeconomic status, and parental perceptions of involvement were all significantly related to parent involvement. Schlenker (2003) noted that parents of high school students believe a significant barrier to parent involvement lies in the lack of confidence that administrators and teachers have in parents as a resource. In a case study conducted to investigate parent perceptions of schools' efforts to involve parents, several interesting findings were discussed (Broadus, 2016). Over a period of 12 weeks, parents and educators in an impoverished public school setting (95% free and reduced lunch rate) were provided with questionnaires and participated in interviews focused on their perceptions around parent involvement (Broadus, 2016). Additionally, parents were observed actively participating in school based activities (Broadus, 2016). Results of the studied indicated that unclear practices, inconsistent implementation, and poor communication associated were seen as barriers for parents seeking to become involved in the school setting (Broadus, 2016).

**At-Risk Students and Subsequent Dropouts**

Institutions of learning are charged with not only understanding the characteristics associated with at-risk status for academic failure but understanding the interplay between these characteristics and the subsequent act of actually dropping out of school. Bowers (2017) sought to increase this understanding by examining the causes, effects, and prevention strategies that influence a student's decision to drop out of high school. Root causes of 21st century drop out, downfalls in current prevention measures, and

patterns associated with participants being asked why the choice was made to leave high school before graduation was explored. Data were collected from 92 students attending an orientation for an adult high school program, and ten students were interviewed in a one-on-one setting. Several factors were identified as reasons for leaving high school before graduation including teen pregnancy as the number one reason, student/family perceptions of education, socioeconomic characteristics of the family/community, disciplinary actions taken while in school, and the student's desire to find full-time employment.

Additionally, Bowers (2017) research is a reminder that the decision to exit school before graduation does not happen spontaneously. Instead, it is a decision that is shaped by lifelong events tied to at-risk behavior, including chronic absenteeism, numerous discipline referrals, and early realized academic frustrations. Though schools work to develop and implement dropout prevention programs designed to meet the unique needs of individual schools and communities, participants in Bowers study indicate they did not feel the interventions were effective in providing solutions for the issues preventing them from being successful in school. Mental health support was cited as one area of lack when examining shortcomings in the interventions offered. Caring adults and additional instructional support early on were seen as additional needs, which might impact the decision to exit school before graduation.

Robinson (2016) investigated behavioral, emotional, and cognitive engagement as predictors of the intent to drop out of school by surveying 431 students in the 11$^{th}$ and 12$^{th}$ grades in two economically disadvantages high schools. Behavioral engagement was examined based on the reason’s students attend school, including teachers, class

offerings, and the school itself. Cognitive engagement included a preference for debating topics over lectures. The emotional engagement was tied to relationships with teachers and classmates. Results indicated the intent to drop out varied among males and females with a higher percentage of females expressing a desire or need to drop out. Interestingly enough, there was no significant relationship between socioeconomic factors, race and educational attainment of parents and the decision to drop out of school. This research pointed to engagement that differentiates those who decide to drop out of school different from those that choose to stay in school through graduation.

McIntyre (2013) also examined the influences that impacted a student's decision to drop out of school before graduation. The qualitative study revealed a common theme. In situations where students focused on the goal of high school graduation, there was a commitment to completing the required task leading to graduation and access to appropriate resources and support to achieve; the student decided to stay in school through graduation. The converse is true for those that ultimately decided to exit school before graduating from high school. Lack of high school graduation goals, course failures, and poor peer relationships leading to attendance challenges and a lack of connection to the school community all lead to a student ultimately deciding to leave school before graduation.

In addition to positive peer and adult relationships, academic support, poor attendance, and overall connection to school and engagement in coursework several other factors are seen as ties to the decision to ultimately leave school before graduation. Social promotion (Owen, 2009), grade retention in upper grades (Roderick, 1991; Jacob & Lefgren, 2009), the lack of inclusive classroom norms (Lowe, 2010), and perceived

prejudice (Lowe, 2010) are all cited as additional reasons students decide to leave school before graduating from high school.

**Common Interventions Utilized**

Knowing what is at stake for those identified at risk for academic and school failure, it then becomes the job of schools to identify and implement interventions which support students at-risk leading to a successful high school career-ending in graduation. Schools have approached this task through a variety of lens. From an academic standpoint, schools have worked to ensure that curriculum and instruction are rigorous and relevant (Haycock, 2001; Kamm, 2019). With the belief that curriculum is the great equalizer concerning quality education that transcends race, ethnicity, or socioeconomic status (Growe & Montgomery, 2003), those charged with overseeing this process work to make sure curriculum is aligned to state and national standards.

Many schools have moved to a tiered system of support known as Multi-Tiered System of Support (MTSS). This system provides Tier 1 universal support, tier 2 support to some that need more remediation and tier 3 support for a few that need intensive supports (Samuels, 2016). The premise of approaching academic and behavior needs in this way is for most students if the universal supports guaranteed to all are appropriate approximately 80% of the students will be served and thrive (Averill & Rinaldi, 2013). This allows school systems to support the other 20% through Tier 2 or Tier 3 supports (Averill & Rinaldi, 2013). When looking more closely at tier 2 and tier 3 supports, common interventions used include Title 1 reading support, computer-based resources, and Special Education services to help remediate missing skills when students qualify (Averill & Rinaldi, 2013). Professional Learning Communities (PLC) has been utilized

as a way of analyzing data and making data-informed decisions about student needs (Dufour, 2014).

Schools have also worked to meet the needs of students at-risk for academic and school failure through the lens of social supports (Johnson, 2018). In recent years' schools have turned to include Social Workers as crucial members of the school staff to provide wraparound school-based and community support services (Johnson, 2018). Counselors are utilized to support the mental health needs of students (Dekruyf, Auger, & Trice-Black, 2013). This partnership around mental health support frequently extends to seeking support for community based mental health professionals (Dekruyf, Auger, & Trice-Black, 2013).

Partnerships have also been developed with community-based agencies to bridge the food deficit gap by providing food for students over the weekend (Harvesters, n.d.). These same agencies have also been used to extend the food offerings through the instructional week by providing evening meals through before and after school programs (Harvesters, n.d.). Many schools that serve at-risk students participate in school-wide free breakfast and lunch programs (Barnum, 2018). In situations where school-wide free breakfast and lunches are not available, individual families can apply for free or reduced breakfast and lunch status.

Viloria (2012) conducted research in the state of California identified seven practices and programs targeted to help schools identified as Beat the Odds (BTO) high schools have a positive impact on graduation rates of their most at-risk high school students. The seven practices and programs identified were (a) the use of data, (b) active remediation programs, (c) strong academic supports, (d) a robust counseling model, (e)

strong connections to school, (f) high expectations for all students, and (g) the development of a robust professional learning community (Viloria, 2012). Results of this study concluded that the three most important programs and practices for schools identified as BTO were the effective use of data, the development of credit remediation programs, and the development of academic support programs. Connection and engagement of students in the school either through specific actives or an intense counseling program were seen as the most critical practice. The number one barrier to success noted in this research revolves around budgetary issues. The researcher noted, for this reason, the future of BTO was bleak as funding was not available.

Schools have attempted other out-of-the-box programs to support those at risk for academic and school success leading to graduation. Witherspoon (2011) examined the perceptions of parents, students, and teachers of Saturday Academy, an intervention program for students who are at-risk for academic failure. The focus of the study was seventh and eighth-grade students in a large school district with 95% of the student body receiving free or reduced lunch. The focus of the study was around perceptions of the program tied with engagement leading to appropriate attendance in school and academic gains. In this study, though the parents perceived the intervention as a productive activity in which their child could participate, they questioned if the intervention met the academic needs of their child. Student perceptions were consistent with that of the parents. Teachers also perceived the intervention to be positive but questioned if the intervention was the best solution.

Dunnavant (2014) investigated a different twist on school-based mentoring by examining the effectiveness of an intervention program entitled Project WALK, which

was launched at a low-income high school in the state of Missouri during the 2012-2013 school year. Graduation coaches were hired and charged with building relationships with students identified as at-risk. Student progress was monitored. Consistent communication with parents, teachers, and school administrators were provided. Data was analyzed in the areas of attendance, discipline, and the number of credits earned during the intervention period. Qualitative information was also considered when examining the effectiveness of the intervention. Results indicated that the graduation coaches were beneficial in preventing dropouts. Data in all of the areas, as mentioned above, showed a positive correlation between participation in the mentorship program and impact in attendance, discipline and number of credits earned during the intervention period.

**School-Based Mentorship and Perceptions of Effectiveness**

In addition to other commonly utilized interventions, many districts have turned to school-based mentorship programs as a way of addressing the needs of students identified at-risk for school failure. Mentoring has been used as a strategy to provide high school students with supportive relationships from non-parental adults to address both academic and non-academic needs. According to the U.S. Department of Education Office of Planning, Evaluation, and Policy Development Policy and Program Studies Service (2017) approximately one-third of all high schools provide some mentoring to some students. The brief goes on to share, of the high schools providing mentoring services, 53% offered or assigned mentoring to select students, and 47% offered or assigned mentoring to all students. Schools that offered or assigned mentoring services

to select student used academic performance and staff recommendations as to the significant indicators of program participation.

There is some significant evidence that suggests school-based mentoring programs may help high school students be successful in school. The National Dropout Prevention Center (2018) has identified mentoring as one of 15 effective strategies for dropout prevention. Check and Connect is one such intervention. The goal of Check and Connect is to assign high school students a mentor that supports students in tracking academic performance as well as providing individualized attention to students (The Power of Caring, 2018). Promoting School Completion of Urban Secondary Youth with Emotional or Behavioral Disabilities featured research conducted to examine the effectiveness of reducing dropout rates among urban, high school students with emotional or behavioral disabilities using the mentoring program Check and Connect. African American students and male students made up the most significant portion of the sample. Program outcomes included lower rates of dropout and mobility and higher rates of persistent attendance and enrollment status in school, along with more comprehensive transition plans beyond high school (Sinclair, Christenson, & Thurlow,2005).

What Works Clearinghouse (2006) featured a mentoring program entitled Achievement for Latinos through Academic Success (ALAS) which represented another intentional mentoring program for middle and high school students designed to address student, family, school, and community factors that impacted the decision to drop out. Students were assigned a mentor that monitors and provides feedback on attendance, behavior, and academic grades. Additionally, mentors served as partner advocates for students and intervened when problems are identified. Research results shared through

What Works Clearinghouse (2006) showed students involved in the ALAS program were significantly more likely to be enrolled at the end of the intervention. Though results lacked statistical significant, positive outcomes associated with enrollment in school were seen two years after the end of the study period. Additionally, students involved in the ALAS program were more likely to be on track to graduate on time at the end of the ninth grade (72% compared with 53% from the control group).

Twelve Together is featured in What Works Clearinghouse as an intervention that provides both adult and peer support through weekly discussion groups led by the trained adult mentor. According to What Works Clearinghouse (2017), Dynarski et al. found that 8% of those students that participated in the Twelve Together program dropped out of school compared to 13% in the control group. Though this was not statistically significant, it was large enough to be considered substantively important based on What Works Clearinghouse standards.

In addition to the statistical data tied to the effectiveness of mentoring interventions, one must examine the perceptions of those engaged in the mentoring program as it pertains to impact on the student's 9-12 educational career. A number of studies have been conducted providing positive perceptions associated with mentoring programs. Barney-DiCianno (2009) noted a positive relationship between academic achievement and participation in a school-based mentoring program after surveying urban high school tenth-grade students. This same study reported no impact on school climate or school connectedness (Barney-DiCianno, 2009). Survey results from two schools with similar demographics indicated the school with a mentoring program reported a positive impact on student perceptions of school climate, school

connectedness, and academic achievement (Angus, 2015). Markos (2011) conducted research dedicated to the impact of a mentoring program targeted towards freshman students and its impact on grades, attendance, and behavior. Data was also gathered through surveys focused on the students' perceptions regarding the impact on the fore mentioned areas. After examining both the quantitative and qualitative data, Markos (2011) indicated significant improvements for freshman student when examining grades, attendance, and behavior during the year in which the freshman mentoring program was implemented.

Hixon (2016) conducted qualitative research focused on middle school student perceptions of participation in a school-based mentoring program in helping to guide African American males in making good behavior and academic choices. Key findings from the study included the perception from students that their mentor helped the with focus and organization. Additionally, students perceived mentors assisted with goal setting, both short-term and long-term goals. Students felt goal setting was a necessary component in establishing focus and organization. Hixon (2016) also noted students felt their behavior was positively impacted because of their relationship with their mentor due to their desire to please the mentor. When mentors were interviewed, they felt short-term, attainable goals were needed to help build trust and stamina for success. Short term goal obtainment led to the development of long-term goals. Mentors attributed success in this area to motivation to achieve intrinsic or extrinsic rewards.

Though the research was not able to establish an intentional tie between school-based mentoring and academic improvement (Hixon, 2016), it was noted that frequently, students were already too far behind academically for the mentorship to have a

significant impact on grades. However, both mentors and students note school-based mentoring having an impact on developing resilience strategies. All agree this stick-to-it-ness is necessary for long-term success.

Finally, students noted that having a mentor helped them with life's challenges and helped them stay on track, which led to improvements academically as well as behaviorally.

**Summary**

An annual dropout rate in 2010 of approximately 1.2 million students points to the fact that far too many students were being left behind in school (Gavigan, 2010). When examining those left behind or impacted by the achievement gap minorities and those with low socioeconomic status tend to be the ones most impacted by this gap in achievement (Ansell, 2011). With the passage of No Child Left Behind Act of 2011, closing the achievement gap became a required focused of all states and school districts within the state (Ansell, 2011). Since the passing of this, and later federal legislation, districts have worked to identify and implement policies, procedures, and practices designed to impact the gap in performance. This study sought to examine the participants' perceived role school-based mentorship plays in the quality of the students' school career. Chapter 3 will focus on study methods associated with the research.

# Chapter 3

## Methods

This study sought to explore how the students identified as being at-risk and the mentors who were assigned to the students perceive the relationship impacted students' overall high school experience. This chapter includes the design of the study, a description of the study population, and sample size. An explanation of the interview protocol used in the study is provided. The method of data collection is explained in addition to the methods used to analyze the data. Study limitations are described.

### Research Design

A qualitative research design was implemented for this study. Denzin and Lincoln (2000) define qualitative research as "the study of things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of, or to interpret, phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them" (p.3). When using research participants as the subject, qualitative research encourages a deeper understanding of social settings or activity (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2012). Within the realm of qualitative research, there are four basic designs: phenomenological, ethnographic, ground theory, and case study research designs. This research sought to examine the perceived impact of the relationships associated with school-based mentorships on the students' overall high school experience by interviewing both students and mentors. With that goal in mind, phenomenological design satisfies this need. Bloomberg and Volpe (2012) stated, "The purpose of phenomenological research is to investigate the meaning of the lived experiences of people to identify the core essence of the human experience as described by research participants" (p.32). Central characteristics that match the scope of this research include first and foremost

interviews as the method for understanding the students and mentors' experiences. Interview questions were opened ended, which allowed participants to fully describe their personal experiences. Phenomenology includes a small sample size to identify themes and generalizations from the open-ended, interview questions asked (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2012).

**Setting**

School District X is located in the heart of a large metropolitan area. The county in which School District X lives ranks 1,570 of 3,135 cities with a median income of $47,023 and an unemployment rate of 7.7% (Flippen, 2014). Data from the [redacted] Department of Elementary and Secondary Education indicate School District X has seen a number of demographic and socioeconomic changes. These changes include an uptick in the percentage of minorities students served in School District X and more specifically African American students. Since the year 2000, the percentage of African American students attending school in School District X has increased from 52.1% to 68.5%. Data also showed a 20.6% increase in the percentage of families which qualify for free and reduced lunch. These changes have resulted in School District X being seen more through the lens of an urban school district as oppose to a suburban school district. Data from School District X Website (n.d.) indicates the district serves approximately 2,700 students PreK-12 in one early childhood center, four elementary schools, one alternative school, one middle school, and one high school. The graduation rate stands at over 90%. Teachers have an average of 12 years' experience with 65% of teachers holding a master's or other advanced degrees. Student demographics in School District X include 70% African American, 25% Caucasian, and 5% all other minority groups.

Demographics at High School X are consistent with that of the district. High School X is the only high school in School District X and the only site hosting the school-based mentorship program. A focus on this program with High School X s desired as a key component associated with an in-depth program review with results aiding in the next steps for implementation.

**Sampling Procedures**

The population for this research study was comprised of students in grades tenth through twelfth identified by school officials as being at-risk for school failure. Attendance rates below the 90%, academic difficulty in the area of mathematics or English as measured by report card grades, and more than one major behavior discipline referral were the factors considered in determining at-risk status. Identification for the mentoring program included students who met at least one of the above mentioned three attributes. The second population for this research study was comprised of adult mentors that served as a mentor for at least one year and basic training in strategies for building relationships with students as well as some of the challenges at-risk student face in School District X.

Purposeful sampling was used to select participants from the population. "The logic of purposeful sampling lies in selecting information-rich cases, with the objective of yielding insight and understanding of the phenomenon under investigation" (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2012, p. 104). The sample consisted of ten at-risk students attending the high school in School District X. Student interview data included for this study met specific criteria tied to being at-risk for overall school failure. This criterion included at-risk status in at least one of three areas: attendance (below 90%), behavior (more than one

major discipline referral), and academic performance (failing grade in one or more core classes). Interview data from six mentors who worked with students identified at-risk were also selected to be a part of the study. Criterion for the study included participation in the mentorship program for the entire 2018 – 2019 school year.

**Instruments**

Because student and mentor interviews were the primary method of data collection, it was imperative that all research questions be satisfied through the purposeful development of interview questions (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2012). Interview questions were originally developed by the researcher, acting as an agent of the district as the Director of Family and Student Services, as part of the program review process with the goal of examining the perceived impact of the mentorship program on students overall high school experience. Questions were reviewed by a committee of educators and community-based organizers, all to identify the impact of mentorship on the students overall high school experience. Specific committee members in the educational field included the Superintendent of Schools, Director of Public Relations, High School X principal, and school-based social worker. After receiving feedback from the committee mentioned above regarding the potential types of questions which should be asked, a first draft was developed by the researcher, and presented for feedback from the committee. Areas of focus included previous experience in a mentorship program, goals tied to participation in the school-based mentorship program, the achievement of the goals shared and other unintended areas of impact. After additional feedback was solicited, a final draft developed by the researcher, was presented to the Superintendent of Schools for final approval.

Interview questions for students spanned several areas of exploration including knowledge of the purpose of a mentor prior to the school-based involvement, the personal desire to participate in the mentorship program, and goals associated with the mentorship program as well as perceptions associated with meeting the identified goals. Questions were asked about initial commonalities with the mentor and how the commonalities impacted the building of a relationship with the mentor. Additionally, questions were asked related to areas impacted by the relationship with the mentor, time spent with the mentor during the school day as well as outside of the school day, and a final question asking for any closing thoughts around the relationship with the mentor and the impact on the overall high school experience.

Similarly, interview questions were asked around the mentor's decision to get involved with the program. Questions were explored around how the mentor perceived commonalities between the student and mentor impacted their ability to form a relationship. Questions around the mentors' understanding of the students' goals for the relationships were explored. Finally, questions around time spent with the student in and out of school were asked.

The following student and mentor interview questions were used in the data analysis of the current study for purposes of exploring the perceived impact of the relationship with school-based mentors on students overall high school experience.

Interview questions for student:

1. Upon first meeting, what did you have in common with your mentor?
2. How did the commonalities help as you were getting to know your mentor?

3. What were your goals for the relationship with your mentor tied to your overall high school experiences?
4. How has your mentor helped you achieve your above-mentioned goals?
5. Thinking beyond your initial goals, you established tied to the relationship with your mentor, in what other ways has your mentor helped you and your overall high school experience?
6. Is there anything else you would like to share that will help me understand the nature of your relationship with your mentor and its impact on your overall high school experience?

Interview questions for the mentor:

1. Why did you decide to become a mentor?
2. What were your goals for supporting your mentee going into the mentorship?
3. What goals did your mentee have going into the relationship tied to his or her overall high school experience? Did you develop these goals together?
4. How has your relationship helped the mentee reach his or her goals?
5. Thinking beyond the established goals going into the relationship, in what ways do you perceive your relationship has helped your mentee and his or her overall high school experience?
6. Are there other areas for which you wished your relationship had helped your mentee and his or her overall high school experience?
7. Is there anything else you would like to share that will help me understand the nature of your relationship with your mentee and its impact on his or her overall high school experience?

## Data Collection Procedures

An application to begin data collection for the current study was requested from the Baker University Institutional Review Board (Appendix A). Archival interview data, gathered as a result of a program review, were used for the analysis of this study. The collection of this data started with a formal request to use archival interview audio recordings gathered from student and mentor interviews from the mentorship program review as part of the study. The request was officially approved by the Interim Superintendent of Schools via email communication (Appendix C), and submitted with the review board application. After securing approval from the Baker University Institutional Review Board (Appendix B) on July 31, 2019, the data collection process began. Audiotapes from the program review was collected for use as part of the study. Each audiotape was coded to protect the identity of the participant.

## Data Analysis and Synthesis

According to Rubin and Rubin (2012), data analysis and synthesis is inclusive of the step by step process of taking raw data from interviews to "clear and convincing answers to your research question" (p.190). This analysis is strengthened by the detailed steps embedded in the design process which ultimately allows for the development of a report that is substantial in its investigation inspired by what the subjects shared (Rubin & Rubin, 2012). These steps included transcribing and summarizing each interview, coding the text, comparing coding across all transcripts, summarizing the results of each sort, and integrate the different interviews to create a complete picture (Rubin & Rubin, 2012).

After each interview, questions and answers were transcribed, without inaudible utterances, verbatim. Special care was taken to ensure that the audio and transcribed

versions of the interview were identical. The researcher reviewed the audio version of the interview while reading the transcribed version of the interview. The researcher then re-read each transcript to begin the data analysis process, and in order to address the two research questions, students and mentors' interview data were analyzed separately.

After each interview was transcribed, the researcher conducted an initial coding of the text by finding and marking relevant concepts and themes in the transcripts. The Dedoose Research Analysis software package was used to upload and fully analyze files of interview transcripts. After transcripts were uploaded, descriptors were used to provide demographic information, including age, grade, ethnicity, and gender. Codes were further enhanced and developed by reading and re-reading the documents line by line. The Dedoose Research Analysis software package allowed the researcher to examine the frequency of codes by transcript. A code definition feature was available, which allowed the researcher to define each code as it was discovered. After all codes were fully explored and sorted into a single data file, the researcher sought to summarize the results of each theme.

**Reliability and Trustworthiness**

Joppe (2000) defines reliability as the extent to which results are consistent over time and includes an honest depiction of the total population included in the study and if the study can be reproduced under similar methodology. Within the context of a qualitative study, reliability and by extension, trustworthiness becomes imperative when painting a picture of critical findings associated with the study. It becomes the researcher's responsibility to ensure reliability and trustworthiness by implementing

verification strategies throughout the research process leading to rigor in the study (Morse, Barrnett, Mayan, Olson, & Spiers, 2002).

Bloomberg and Volpe (2012) outline several strategies used in this research study to establish reliability and trustworthiness of the study:

1. Clarification was provided regarding any biases the researcher might have that would have an impact on any conclusions associated with the study.
2. The researcher's role was added as a section that speaks to the involvement in the field related to the study.
3. A colleague examined field notes, and then questions asked to help the research examine assumptions and consider alternate ways of looking at the data.
4. Detailed information was provided around how the archival data was collected and analyzed.
5. Detailed information was provided by the researcher regarding background information related to the setting for which the study occurred.

**Researcher's Role**

The researcher has worked in the field of education for over 20 years and holds a Bachelor of Science in Education, Master of Arts in Education, and Master of Arts in Educational Leadership. The researcher has worked exclusively in urban settings serving students that have been identified as being at risk of overall school failure. The researcher has worked in a variety of positions to support at-risk students in being successful. Positions held have been both in the general education and special education realm including self-contained and resource special education, special education

evaluator, general education elementary classroom teacher, reading teacher, literacy coach, elementary principal, and Director of Family and Student Services.

In the researcher's latest role as Director of Family and Student Services, opportunities have been provided to advocate and develop programming on behalf of the most marginalized students. This includes working with the district department of academic services to develop intervention supports for students with academic or behavior skill gaps, developing programming for students identified as homeless tied to McKinney Vento legislation, clarifying processes and guidelines for managing student behavior, and facilitating the development of a mentorship program for high school students designed to support students identified at risk for overall school failure. This advocacy has been recognized beyond the district in which the researcher serves and has extended to state and nation-wide work.

Coupled with the researcher's personal experiences as an African American female, this work has shaped the researcher's values as it pertains to services and supports available to students at risk for overall school failure leading to inherent biases in the areas of overall access to programming which has a measured impact of overall school success. This led the researcher to develop many of the programs mentioned above. No participant had a direct relationship with the researcher, which would represent a conflict of interest that may have imparted bias on the research study.

**Limitations**

"Because analysis ultimately rests with the thinking and choices of the researcher, qualitative studies, in general, are limited by the researcher's subjectivity" (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2012). Although the researcher was meticulous in remaining unbiased, the nature

of this type of analysis makes that problematic. Additionally, student and adult participants potential desire to please the researcher may impact the sincerity of the response. Finally, due to the lack of clear testing tied to statistical significance, it is challenging to extend findings from qualitative studies to a broader population with the same degree of certainty as quantitative studies (Atieno, 2009).

**Summary**

The goal of this chapter was to outline the research method used to answer the research questions. Procedures, study participants, data collection/analysis, and interview questions were introduced as a way of outlining precisely how the study was conducted and who participated in the study. Reliability and trustworthiness strategies were presented. Research findings are discussed in Chapter 4.

# Chapter 4

## Results

This chapter provides an overview of the findings of the research study. The purpose of this study was to explore how mentors and students perceive their relationships impact the students' overall high school experience. Archival interview data were studied for ten students that participated in a mentorship program in School District X identified as being at-risk as measured by declining grades in core subject areas, more than one major disciplinary infraction, or an attendance rate below ninety percent during the spring of 2019. Additionally, archival interview data were studied for five mentors during the spring of 2019. All student participants were in tenth through twelfth grades, and mentors had participated in the program at least one year. Pseudonyms were used to protect the identity of all participants. Table 3 represents a summary of student participant demographics. Table 4 represents a summary of mentor participant demographics.

Table 3

*Mentor Participant Demographics*

| Pseudonym | Gender | Race | Years of Mentorship Service |
|---|---|---|---|
| Linda | Female | African American | 1 |
| Bill | Male | Caucasian | 3 |
| Chris | Male | Caucasian | 3 |
| Elizabeth | Female | Caucasian | 2 |
| Edward | Male | African American | 3 |

Table 4

*Student Participant Demographics*

| Pseudonym | Gender | Race | Grade | Academic Challenges | Behavior Challenges | Attendance Challenges |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| James | Male | African American | 11 | Yes | No | Yes |
| Rick | Male | African American | 10 | Yes | Yes | Yes |
| Christine | Female | African American | 11 | Yes | No | Yes |
| Rachelle | Female | African American | 10 | Yes | Yes | No |
| David | Male | African American | 10 | Yes | No | Yes |
| William | Male | Caucasian | 11 | Yes | No | Yes |
| Kelly | Female | African American | 10 | Yes | No | No |
| Anthony | Male | African American | 10 | Yes | No | Yes |
| Vanessa | Female | African American | 12 | Yes | Yes | No |
| Keith | Male | African American | 10 | Yes | Yes | Yes |

Ten students' interview data were included in the study (male = 6 and female = 4; Caucasian = 1 and African American = 9). One senior was included in the study, along with three juniors and the remaining 6 sophomores. Five mentors' interview data were also included in the study (male = 3 and female = 2; Caucasian = 3 and African American = 2). Caucasian mentor participants ($n$ = 3) made up 60% of those studied. The average number of years of service for mentor participants in the study sample was 2.4 years.

**Themes Emerged from Students' Interviews**

Three major themes were constructed from an analysis of the data derived from the codes. The first theme, *Mentor-Student Commonalities,* focused on the commonalities

between mentors and students. This theme also focused on how the commonalities aided in the development of a relationship between mentors and students. The second theme focused on *Needing a Listening Ear.* This theme delved into the need's students had tied to participation in the mentorship program. Theme three focused on the *Perceived Positive Impact of Mentorship.* This theme focused on the students' perceptions around the impact of students' overall high school experience.

Table 5

*Student Interview Themes and Categories*

| | Themes and Categories | Frequency |
|---|---|---|
| Theme 1 | Mentor-Student Commonalities | |
| | Similar Interest | (S) 6 |
| | Mutual Family Background | (S) 5 |
| Theme 2 | Needing a Listening Ear | (S) 7 |
| Theme 3 | Perceived Positive Impact of Mentorship | |
| | Positive Perception | (S) 9 |

*Note: S = student*

**Theme 1: Mentor-student commonalities.** Recognizing that the identification of similar interest or backgrounds between a mentor and mentee can serve as a foundational tool to building an impactful relationship leading to a better overall high school experience, student participants were asked to describe what they had in common with their mentors as well as their perceptions around how the commonalities helped as the students were getting to know the mentors. Student participants mentioned several

different areas of commonalities, including similar experiences and interests. All student participants reported that the commonalities helped as they were building a relationship with their mentors.

Similar interest was the top one commonality reported by the majority of student participants ($n$ = 6), and it included similar sports and career interests. David reported that a shared love of football as the glue that brought him and his mentor together. William mentioned that basketball bridged the gap between himself and his mentor by saying, "When we needed things to talk about, we would just go there [in the conversation]." Another female student focused on the shared interest in soccer as she discussed how the commonalities aided the relationship-building process when she shared, "She'd like, give me advice on soccer, tell me like what position I should do and stuff like that. How to get better at it. She told me she'd help me practice if I needed it and stuff" (Kelly). Because both played soccer, Kelly stated they always had something for which to talk.

When asked what she had in common with her mentor and how it helped in building the relationship, Vanessa said the following:

> Just knowing that she studied law and did the things in the courtroom and stuff, things that I plan to do that was like really exciting to me too because I had someone to talk to that actually been there before. Not just someone in my ear trying to persuade me to do this.

In this case, the fact that the mentor had a similar career interest spoke to the student and helped facilitate the building of the relationship. Christine shared, "She works in the

health field, which is where I want to work. She is a nurse, and we talk about what it takes to be a nurse."

Similar experiences were another area of commonality shared by half of the student participants. A male student focused on mutual family backgrounds as a point of connection as the relationship was being built. It was these similarities that led this student to develop an instant connection with his mentor. James shared:

> We came from the same neighborhood. He was born in the 30s [slang for the area from which the mentor and student grew up], I was born in the 30s. He also told me how his dad was put in the system a lot, and my dad was put in the system a lot. So, it was just a bunch of correlating back and forth. And when I first met him, it was like this guy is really cool. I think I am going to like him.

When asked about how the commonalities as mentioned above helped in building a relationship, James said, "I feel that, when I found out that he came from the same hood that I came from and had the same background that I came from, I felt like he was going to be able to understand me more." Another student discussed similar problems with both her father and her mentor's father regarding health issues. She went on to share, "She helped take care of him, making sure he had everything that he needed. It is also the same with me. My father, many of my family members, need me." (Vanessa). Keith shared both him and his mentor had been "through some things" growing up, and that allowed them to "click."

**Theme 2: Needing a listening ear.** Knowing that strong relationships grounded in realistic goals can lead to positive change in students' overall high school experience, student participants were asked about goals they had for the relationship as well as

support received from their mentors in achieving their goals tied to their overall high school experiences. Interestingly enough, the goals discussed frequently manifested themselves as needs students anticipated getting out of the relationship. Seven student participants reported needing a listening ear as the number one need tied to the relationship with the mentor. These student participants went on to share that their mentors met this expectation. For example, Rick reported, "I like to talk, and he liked to listen. It gave me a chance to have someone to listen to me." Anthony spoke of just needing an opportunity to open up more and talk about school. Another male student also shared, “He would just talk to me, like make me feel like someone is listening to what I have to say” (David).

**Theme 3: Perceived positive impact of mentorship.** When asked for closing thoughts related to the nature of the relationship with the mentors, and its impact on the overall high school experience, overwhelming student participants (*n*=9) reported the mentorship had a positive impact. When asked, one female student participants stated, "I definitely advise everyone to get some type of mentor or a tutor someone who you can talk to, especially pertaining to the future" (Vanessa). Another female student shared the following, "Everything's just been good. Like, ever since she came around, my attitude has been so much better, and it's been way better. Actually, we need more people like her" (Rachelle). Keith shared his mentor reminded him not to look back on the things of the past and to keep his head up. Keith was proud to report the advice worked when he shared, "I got suspended so many times, and like to the point where I had all D's and F's or something like that. Now my grade point average is 3.2."

One male student reported how his perception around participation in the mentorship changed over time. When asked for closing remarks, he stated, "When I first got my mentor, I was like, man, my mentor is here, I can't eat lunch with my friends, but now it's like oh, my mentor is here, I get to talk to him and have a good conversation over lunch" (William).

When asked, James shared that the mentor looked for the best in him regardless of the situation. He went on to share the following:

> Last year when I was going through the things I was going through with my mom, I started to get into a little bit of trouble. When he saw that I had gotten into a little bit of trouble, even though I got into that trouble, he still looked at me as though I am a good kid going through something, and I need help, and I really appreciated that from him.

**Themes emerged for students' interviews summary.** Archival interview data was analyzed with the goal of seeking to understand how students identified as being at-risk perceive their relationship with school-based mentors impacted their overall high school experience. Questions asked focused on several foundational attributes the researcher felt was necessary to build and sustain a relationship capable of positively impacting students' overall high school career.

The results suggested that first, the commonalities discovered between students and mentors at the very beginning of the relationship helped the initial building of the mentor-student relationship since students were able to connect with their mentors. Second, students reported the need of having someone to listen to them, and the need was achieved in their relationship with a mentor. Most importantly, most student participants

expressed positive feelings associated with their mentor-student relationship and its impact on the overall high school experience.

**Themes Emerged from Mentors' Interviews**

Three major themes were constructed from an analysis of the data derived from the codes. The first theme, *Student Needs Satisfaction,* delved into needs expressed by students and their satisfaction around having the needs met. The second theme focused on *the Perceived Positive Impact of Mentorship.* This theme focused on the mentors' perceptions around the overall impact of the students' high school experience. Theme three focused on *Mentor Motivation and Goals.* This theme took a closer look at the mentors' motivations tied to supporting student mentees as well as the goals they had going into a relationship with specific students assigned to them.

Table 6

*Mentor Interview Themes and Categories*

| | Themes and Categories | Frequency |
|---|---|---|
| Theme 1 | Students' Needs Satisfaction | |
| | Receive Advice | (M) 3 |
| | Emotional Support | (M) 3 |
| | Academic Support | (M) 3 |
| | Provide Listening Ear | M) 4 |
| | Provide Advice | (M) 4 |
| | Provide Resources | (M) 3 |
| Theme 2 | Perceived Positive Impact of Mentorship | |
| | Positive Perception | (M) 5 |
| Theme 3 | Mentor Motivation and Goals | |
| | Giving Back | (M) 3 |
| | Academic Support | (M) 5 |
| | Listening Ear | (M) 3 |

*Note: M = Mentor*

**Theme 1: Students' need satisfaction.** In many ways, mentors represent the cognitive and emotional foundation in building a stable relationship with student mentees so that goals can be met, leading to a positive impact on the overall high school career. For this reason, mentor participants were also asked about the goals their student mentees had for the relationship. They were also asked about support they felt they provided to help in achieving the goals tied to their overall high school experiences. Much like the

student participants, answers to this question focused on students' various needs. More specifically, mentor participants were able to identify that student needs involved receiving advice (*n* = 3) and receiving support. Support received came in the form of having a listening ear for emotional support (*n* = 3), and support with academic challenges (*n* = 3). Linda shared her student mentee needed someone to keep her on track by giving her advice. Linda's student mentee wanted her to "help her make great decisions," by offering advice. Another mentor, Bill, shared, "I think he needed a person that would really care about him and see him as a person by listening to him." Elizabeth felt her student mentee needed additional academic support, including completing homework and other task and staying organized.

Mentors satisfied the identified needs by providing a listening ear (*n* = 4), providing advice (*n* = 4), and providing resources (*n* = 3). For the mentors interviewed, providing resources came in several ways. One male mentor (Chris) shared an experience in which he took his mentee for his driving test and, in the process, provided the resource of a car for the driving test. He discussed the fact that the student did not have access to a car that could be used for a driving test. Since obtaining a driving license was one of the mentee goals, the mentor committed to allowing him to use his car for the driving test. Chris went on to share, "He drove my car for the driving test, and he passed, and he was so excited when he got a chance to pass his driving test. He drove us home in my car, which was pretty exciting for him."

**Theme 2: Perceived positive impact of mentorship.** When asked for closing thoughts related to the nature of the relationship with the student mentees and its impact on the overall high school experience, all mentor participants reported they perceived the

mentorship had a positive impact on the overall high school experience of their mentees leading to overall growth and maturity. One male mentor conveyed an overall change in the mentee's interactions with others. He shared, "I think he has become more outgoing, and able to jump right into a conversation and talk a little bit more without being so timid about it. He was a quiet kid and came out [of his shell] and started sharing more" (Edward). Through the mentorship interactions, Bill shared his student mentee was able to get over some of his humps tied to grades, attendance, and academics. He went on to share, though his student mentee had behavior challenges during the year, their relationship was able to be the constant that he needed to move on (Bill). Chris shared that he felt because of the relationship, his student mentee was able to see life through a different lens. The relationship opened up new possibilities (Chris).

**Theme 3: Mentor motivation and goals.** Recognizing personal motivation can impact how a person approaches the work of mentoring another person; part of this study included examining the inspiration around participating in a mentorship program. Mentors were asked to share their motivations tied to being a mentor as well as their goals going into the mentorship program. Giving back to the community was shared as the top motivation with, supporting students academically, and being a listening ear, the top mentor goals tied to this theme. The number one reason mentors gave for wanting to be a mentor was to give back to the community ($n$ = 3). Bill spoke of his reasons as a mission or a calling when he said, “I’m committed to [giving back to] community and committed to [the district], and I have, I enjoy young men and being with young men, and I thought this was something I needed to do." Edward shared, "I wanted to give back to my community in a tangible way where I could see a difference in a child's life."

When asked about goals as a mentor going into the mentorship, all mentors talked about supporting the mentee academically. "I wanted him to achieve academically, to where he was able to graduate from high school and hopefully even to be able to go to college someday or trade school," (Chris). Bill mentioned, "I do enjoy coaching academics, I love some of the subjects that he's taking, and so I thought that I could help in that way."

Three mentor participants mentioned a desire to understand the students' needs and goals. One male mentor shared his process for listening to his mentee when he articulated the following:

> One of the first things I asked him was what were some of his goals to get out of this time. Was it merely a friendship or an older person to bounce ideas off of or try to gain, try to move from a C to a B in terms of grade level or whatever? I left it open-ended at first. I tried to understand what his needs and goals were. (Bill)

**Themes emerged from mentors' summary.** Archival interview data was analyzed with the goal of seeking to understand how mentors supporting student mentees identified as being at-risk perceive their relationship impacted students' overall high school experience. Questions were asked focused on several foundational attributes the researcher felt was necessary to build and sustain a relationship capable of positively impacting students' overall high school career.

The results suggest that the mentors were able to identify the needs of the student mentees within the relationship and satisfy the identified needs. Second, the mentors' motivations and goals for the relationship correlated to the needs of the student mentees

they supported. Finally, mentors expressed positive feelings associated with their mentor-student relationship and its impact on the overall high school experience.

**Summary**

Archival interview data from ten students identified at risk as well as five mentors having served in the role a minimum of one year were analyzed for this study. The results from the data collected describe perceptions tied to commonalities between mentors and students, and how these commonalities aided in the building of the relationship. Student needs and how the needs were met were examined. Additionally, the mentors' motivation and goals were explored. Finally, the overall perceived impact that the mentorship had on students' overall high school experience was discussed in this chapter. Chapter 5 presents findings related to the literature, implications for action, and recommendations for future research.

# Chapter 5

## Interpretation and Recommendations

Chapter 5 is divided into several sections. The study summary, including the overview of the problem, purpose statement and research questions, review of methodology, and major findings, are discussed. Findings related to the literature are included. Finally, implications for action and recommendations for future research are explored.

### Study Summary

The study summary presents an overview of how students perceived involvement in a mentorship impacted their overall high school experience. The purpose statement and research questions describe why the study was conducted. The review of the methodology discussed how the researcher designed and collected data for the study. Results of the current research study were provided under major findings.

**Overview of the problem.** Closing the achievement continues to be a challenge in our U.S. educational system (Lynch, 2017). Despite research on the subject, educators continue to struggle with identifying school-based interventions that positively impact the achievement gap (Garcia & Weiss, 2017). The research focused on the perceived impact of mentor and student relationships on the overall high school experience could provide additional insight into the effectiveness of such programs.

**Purpose statement and research questions.** The purpose of this research study was to explore how both high school students and mentors perceived a school-based mentorship program impacted the school career for students identified as at-risk within the School District X located in a Midwest metropolitan area. Archival interview data

was used because it allowed the researcher to examine stories and perceptions through responsive interviews. Specific areas of research included commonalities between participants and how the commonalities impacted the building of the relationship, goals tied to the relationship, time spent engaged in activities in the relationship, and overall perceptions of the impact of the relationship.

The following research questions were used to guide the study:

1. How do students identified as being at-risk perceive their relationship with school-based mentors impact their overall high school experience?

2. How do school-based mentors perceive their relationship with students identified as being at-risk impact their overall high school experience?

**Review of the methodology**

A qualitative research design was implemented for this study. Qualitative archival interview data was used to collect data. Interview questions were initially developed by the researcher, acting as an agent of the district as the Director of Family and Student Service, as part of the program review process. Open-ended interviews were conducted with ten students and five mentors who participated in the school-based mentorship program. Data collected from the study participants represented their perceptions of the impact of the school-based mentorship program on the overall high school experience. After the archival interview data was retrieved, the audio recordings were transcribed, and the electronic files uploaded into the Dedoose research analysis software. Codes were generated based on participant responses. Major findings were developed based on the frequency of the codes and were presented in Chapter 4.

**Major findings.** Data collected from archival interviews specified the commonalities discovered between students and mentors at the very beginning of the relationship helped the initial building of the mentor-student relationship since students were able to connect with their mentors. Additionally, participants identified students needed mentors to meet their emotional needs by being a listening ear. Data collected would point to the fact that this need was met. Furthermore, mentors' motivation and goals for the relationship correlated to the students' needs expressed. Finally, most participants expressed positive feelings associated with their mentor-student relationship and its impact on the overall high school experience.

## Findings Related to the Literature

Before collecting data for the current study, a review of the literature examining interventions utilized to support students at-risk for academic failure was conducted. The available research suggested a need to ensure that students had access to a rigorous and relevant curriculum and instruction (Haycock, 2001; Kamm, 2019). Additionally, available research suggested a need to have systems in place to support those that are not successfully learning the standards tied to the curriculum (Averill & Rinaldi, 2013). Other research pointed to the addition of social workers as a way of providing wraparound supports for students and their families (Dekruyf, Auger, & Trice-Black, 2013). Further research highlighted organizations like Harvesters (n.d.) that partnered with schools to support students and their nutritional needs. Programs such as Beat the Odds (Viloria, 2012), which included a strong counseling component and programing, yielded results tied to increased attendance (Witherspoon, 2011).

The literature reviewed also examined school-based mentorships and the perceived effectiveness of the programs of focus. The National Dropout Prevention Center (2018) identified mentoring as one of 15 effective strategies for dropout prevention, highlighting Check and Connect as one such mentorship program yielding positive results. What Works Clearinghouse (2006) featured another such mentoring program called Achievement for Latinos through Academic Success (ALAS), which shared positive data two years after the end of the study period. Twelve Together (What Works Clearinghouse, 2017) was another such program showing positive gains when examining dropout rates of those who participated in the program compared to the control group. The current study was designed to add to the existing research on school-based mentorship programs and its impact on students at-risk for academic failure. A discussion of the results, which were guided by the research questions, is presented.

Lindt & Blair (2017) identified three components that for them represented the nature of the mentoring relationship, including, "relational connection, relational role, and relational closeness." Relational connection involves the ability of the mentor and mentee to develop a connection on a personal level (Lindt & Blair, 2017). It is generally understood that this process takes time to not only build the relationship but become and maintain the status of a trusted friend (Garringer & Jucovy, 2007). Relational role speaks to the role a mentor may play in the life of a mentee, and oftentimes is fluid, changing as the needs of the mentee changes (Lindt & Blair, 2017). Relational closeness really speaks to the heart of the mentor-mentee relationships and involves the ability for both individuals to be authentic within the relationship leading to an emotional closeness that impacts school performance and school experiences (Lindt & Blair, 2017) and is ground

in the idea of goals and expectations driving the relationship (Garringer & Jucovvy, 2007).

Elements of relational connection and relational role (Lindt & Blair, 2017) was seen in the current study through the examination of data associated with mentor-student commonalities and the impact on the ability to build a relationship and ways mentors met the needs of the student mentees. Data from the current study indicated that commonalities helped develop a connection on a personal level. Additionally, the current study highlighted data that signaled both mentors and students felt the mentors meet the students' needs within the relationship, necessary for being responsive to and meeting the needs of the student mentees.

Data from the current study cited students needed a listening ear as a way of having their emotional needs met. This emotional need ties directly to the desire for relational closeness, as defined in the above-mentioned paragraph. This data is also supported by a study conducted by Durand (2019). In the article entitled, *Reflections on a Mentoring Program for Boys of Color* (Durand, 2019), when asked what makes a good mentor, students interviewed shared it was important to have someone they can talk to, willing to give guidance and advice, and willing to help problem solve challenges. When asked about their perceptions associated with their ability to talk with their mentors about anything, 69% of students interviewed in the study agreed or strongly agreed with the statement (Brown, 2017). All students interviewed expressed that it is vital to have someone they can talk to about anything (Brown, 2017). In a study focused on program coordinators' perceptions of mentoring programs, coordinators interviewed, "believed that the relationships were critical to gaining the trust and respect of students" (Parker,

2018). Though the focus of the mentorship study was to impact academic gains, coordinators recognized a holistic approach is necessary which should include the students' physical, mental, and emotional needs starting with listening and seeking to understand the students' needs (Parker, 2018).

The data from the current study would suggest an overall positive perception regarding the impact of school-based mentorships on the overall high school experience. Other studies seeking to gain feedback on perceptions or satisfaction with mentorship programs identified similar results. In an evaluation of a study measuring the impact of a mentoring program, parents, mentors, and mentees all expressed satisfaction with the 5000 Models of Excellence Project (Stanford, 2016). All parents were pleased with the children's involvement and expressed a desire for their children to continue in the program (Stanford, 2016). Parents felt that their children had someone to talk to when other adults may not be available (Stanford, 2016). Likewise, mentors all agreed that the program had a positive influence on the students (Stanford, 2016). Finally, students agreed with the assessment of the parents and mentors, acknowledging the positive impact the program had on their lives (Stanford, 2016).

Durand (2019) shared accounts of participants committing that his mentor helped make him into the person he is today. The boys interviewed were able to identify ways they changed over time and credited their mentors with the change (Durand, 2019). Gratitude was expressed for the engagement (Durand, 2019). This overall sentiment was shared by participants interviewed in the study conducted by (Brown, 2017). Seventy-seven percent of mentees that took the attitude scale presented in the study appeared to have high perceptions of their interactions with the mentors (Brown, 2017).

## Conclusions

The current research study presented information on the perceived impact of school-based mentorship on the overall high school experience. Archival data from responsive interviews from mentors and students at-risk for academic failure provided data-rich testimonials. The existing literature has indicated the need for mentorship programs to support students. The results of the qualitative interviews could provide useful information for districts seeking to enhance support programing for students at-risk for academic failure.

**Implications for action.** The development of school-based mentorship programs represents an essential component for supporting students that are at-risk for academic failure. Several factors should be considered when developing the program, including the selection of mentors, the process for pairing mentors with students, and the commitment from both regarding time spent interacting within the mentorship.

The current study would suggest that the process of selecting mentors committed to supporting students at-risk for school failure must include ensuring those selected are open to meeting students where they are in the high school journey. This information can then be used to help the students identify and meet the goals they have for the relationship different from the goals the mentors might have for the students going into the relationship. Before participation in the mentorship, the current study would suggest that mentors must understand though the student often times needs direct support academically, as indicated by declining grades, the student may not be ready to receive this direct consideration. Instead, students might require advice associated with

seemingly unrelated home or community-based challenges, that once solved, would prepare students to then tackle in school academic challenges.

Additionally, the relatability between the mentor and student are key indicators tied to productivity in the relationship between ethnicity and gender. The current study would suggest that mentors need not worry about their ability to relate to high school students of a different ethnic and gender, assuming other commonalities exist between the two individuals. These commonalities can be anything from the love of a similar sport or hobby to having had similar experiences and challenges growing up or similar family dynamics.

**Recommendations for future research.** The following recommendation represents areas of future investigation identified by the researcher. The current study included archival interview data from mentors and students from one school located in the heart of a large, Midwest metropolitan area. Additional studies could be expanded to include participants from other geographic locations that represent a similar population. The data size for this study was archival data from 15 total participants (ten students and five mentor participants). The sample size could be increased to include additional students and mentors.

The current study did not delve into specific activities or content for which mentors and students engaged during the interactions. Future studies could include questions focused on the activities/content of each session and the impact of the interactions. Additionally, more probing questions could be asked requesting mentors and students to be more specific regarding the impact of the mentorship on the overall high school experience. Considerations around how intentional mentor training might

influence the intensity of the mentor/mentee relationship leading to a positive impact of overall high school experience is another area of possible focus for future studies.

Finally, the current study did not examine pre and post-academic, attendance, and behavior quantitative data for at-risk students participating in the mentorship program. Future research could be inclusive of all at-risk students engaged in a mentorship program. Data could also be pulled for those students that participated in interviews. Data in either format could be used to identify if the mentorship ultimately had both a perceived and data-driven impact on students' overall high school experience.

**Concluding remarks.** This study examined the perceived impact of school-based mentorship programs on students' overall high school experience. Participants' commonalities, goals, time spent interacting, and overall perceptions were considered. Archival interview data was used to describe how participants each finding shaped their experiences in the school-based mentorship program. Although archival interview data illustrated difference anecdotal stories associated with participants' experiences in the program, the value was seen in the relationship and its impact.

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# Appendices

# Appendix A: IRB Approval Letter

*Baker University Institutional Review Board*

July 31st, 2019

Dear Stacy King and Harold Frye,

The Baker University IRB has reviewed your project application and approved this project under Exempt Status Review. As described, the project complies with all the requirements and policies established by the University for protection of human subjects in research. Unless renewed, approval lapses one year after approval date.

Please be aware of the following:

1. Any significant change in the research protocol as described should be reviewed by this Committee prior to altering the project.
2. Notify the IRB about any new investigators not named in original application.
3. When signed consent documents are required, the primary investigator must retain the signed consent documents of the research activity.
4. If this is a funded project, keep a copy of this approval letter with your proposal/grant file.
5. If the results of the research are used to prepare papers for publication or oral presentation at professional conferences, manuscripts or abstracts are requested for IRB as part of the project record.

Please inform this Committee or myself when this project is terminated or completed. As noted above, you must also provide IRB with an annual status report and receive approval for maintaining your status. If you have any questions, please contact me at npoell@bakeru.edu or 785.594.4582.

Sincerely,

*Nathan Poell,* MA
Chair, Baker University IRB

## Appendix B: District Approval Letter

**From:** Michael Weishaar <mweishaar@[redacted].k12.mo.us>
**Sent:** Tuesday, July 30, 2019 12:52 PM
**To:** Stacy Heard King <sking@[redacted].k12.mo.us>
**Subject:** consent letter for dissertation

This email represents consent for Stacy King to use all archival data from the [redacted] School District associated with the study of perceived impact of mentorship on the overall high school experience. This includes but is not limited to data from the program review of [redacted] School District's program review of the mentorship program.

If you have any questions regarding this consent, feel free to contact me personally,

Sincerely,

Michael Weishaar

Notice of Nondiscrimination

The [redacted] Board of Education is committed to maintaining a workplace and educational environment that is free from discrimination and harassment in admission or access to, or treatment or employment in, its programs, services, activities and facilities. In accordance with law, the district strictly prohibits discrimination and harassment against employees, students or others on the basis of race, color, religion, sex, national origin, ancestry, disability, age, genetic information or any other characteristic protected by law. The [redacted] is an equal opportunity employer. (See policy AC.)

## Appendix C: Archival Interview Questions for Mentors and Mentees

Interview questions for student:

1. Upon first meeting, what did you have in common with your mentor?
2. How did the commonalities help as you were getting to know your mentor?
3. What were your goals for the relationship with your mentor tied to your overall high school experiences?
4. How has your mentor helped you achieve your above-mentioned goals?
5. Thinking beyond your initial goals, you established tied to the relationship with your mentor, in what other ways has your mentor helped you and your overall high school experience?
6. Is there anything else you would like to share that will help me understand the nature of your relationship with your mentor and its impact on your overall high school experience?

Interview questions for the mentor:

1. Why did you decide to become a mentor?
2. What were your goals for supporting your mentee going into the mentorship?
3. What goals did your mentee have going into the relationship tied to his or her overall high school experience? Did you develop these goals together?
4. How has your relationship helped the mentee reach his or her goals?
5. Thinking beyond the established goals going into the relationship, in what ways do you perceive your relationship has helped your mentee and his or her overall high school experience?
6. Are there other areas for which you wished your relationship had helped your mentee and his or her overall high school experience?

7. Is there anything else you would like to share that will help me understand the nature of your relationship with your mentee and its impact on his or her overall high school experience?

## Appendix D: Qualitative Research Themes and Codes

**Themes and Corresponding Qualitative Codes**

| Commonalities | Commonalities Impact on Relationship Building | Student Goals for the Mentorship | Mentor Goals for the Mentorship | How Helped Achieve Goals |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Close in age | Positive impact | Receive support with school attendance | Provide support with school attendance | Provide resources |
| Current family dynamics | Negative impact | Receive support with making better behavior choices | Provide support with making better behavior choices | Provide advice |
| Ethnic background | | Receive support with academic needs/tutor | Provide support with academic needs/tutor | Be a listening ear |
| Gender | | Listening ear | Be a listening ear | Provide academic support |
| Hobbies/Past times | | Receive advice | Provide advice | Provide support with attendance |
| Career interest | | Support with home/community-based relationships | Provide support with home/community-based relationships | Provide support with home/community based relationships |
| Religious background | | Support with career future | Provide support with career future | Provide support with career future |
| Similar personalities | | Support with sports | Provide support with sports | Provide support with making appropriate behavior choices |
| Sports | | | | |
| Upbringing | | | | |

**Themes and Corresponding Qualitative Codes**

| Consistency of Interactions | Time of Day | Overall Perceptions Around Impact | Why wanted to Become a Mentor | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Regular interactions | During the school day | Positive experience | Give back to the community | |
| Irregular interactions | Outside of the school day | Negative experience | Be a listening ear/build relationship | |
| | | | Impact behavior at school | |
| | | | Impact attendance at school | |
| | | | Support career after high school (college/votech) | |
| | | | Support academic needs/tutor | |