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EXAMING STUDENTS' PERCEPTIONS AND ATTITUDES TOWARD THE EDUCATIONAL SYSTEMS' ABILITY TO IMPROVE THEIR FUTURE: A PHENOMENOLOGICAL APPROACH

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ABSTRACT

EXAMINING STUDENTS' PERCEPTIONS AND ATTITUDES TOWARD

THE EDUCATIONAL SYSTEMS' ABILITY TO IMPROVE THEIR FUTURE:

A PHENOMENOLOGICAL APPROACH

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The purpose of this research study was to examine the perceptions and attitudes of students towards education's ability to improve their future outcomes. This qualitative study employed a phenomenological research design in order to closely examine students' experiences. Participants for this study were selected from a single district on Long Island from one grade. Student participants were all from similar socioeconomic backgrounds and were all eligible for free and reduced lunch through the school district. Data was collected via various methods. Interviews were conducted with each participant and each interview was recorded and later transcribed to enable for each disaggregation of data. One 47-minute observation was conducted of each student in either their English Language Arts or math class. Teachers also provided artifacts of each student's work. Lastly, data was collected through a close examination of the registration packets that parents completed when registering their children for school. Permission was obtained to participate in this study which provided the ability to collect data in all of these ways. This study is significant because it points to pivotal information regarding how educators and stakeholders can ensure the curriculum is geared toward assisting students in

achieving their dreams and aspirations. It also provides a better understanding of how

students view specific subjects and their importance in their lives which ultimately can

help to drive decisions regarding students' ability to be successful in school

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION

A vast literature supports that socioeconomic status (SES) is a contributing factor to academic performance (Crowe et al., 2009; Duncan & Brooks-Gunn, 2000; Raudenbush, 2004). The American Psychological Association defines socioeconomic status (SES) as the "social standing or class of an individual or group. It is often measured as a combination of education, income, and occupation." When discussing SES, researchers have focused on specific areas of human capital such as education, social capital/family's social network resources, wealth, and cultural capital: Generally finding that these SES-related variables influence student outcomes (Acharya & Joshi, 2009). According to Egalite (2016), "estimates suggest that, by age three, children whose parents receive public assistance hear less than a third of the words encountered by their higher-income peers" (p. 2). Additionally, students of lower SES households are at greater risk for reading delays. These students also experience delayed letter recognition relative to their peers (Aikens & Barbarin, 2008; Whitehurst & Lonigan, 1998). With this information, it is essential to recognize that there are systemic opportunity gaps that exist to challenge SES students. That is, low-SES students are not academically disadvantaged; they are faced with pervasive challenges that create a gap in opportunities and resources available to them.

Students from lower socioeconomic homes often enter school with considerably lower skills than their peers from higher socioeconomic status homes (Chiu, 2016; Crowe et al., 2009; Duncan & Brooks-Gunn, 2000). It is critical to note that this is not to say that students from low-SES homes are in any way less capable. Students from low-SES homes frequently have challenging circumstances and systemic factors that can influence

their academic performance as measured by traditional academic testing. In many cases low-SES students experience reduced access to educational resources which creates obstacles that may impact academic performance. Consequently, research demonstrates that in homes where the income is below the poverty threshold, students score substantially lower than those living in homes with an income above the poverty threshold (Duncan & Brooks-Gunn, 2000). Not only does students' socioeconomic status impact the outcomes of their early academic years due to systemic obstacles, but socioeconomic status also influences the ability to sustain average to above-average grades in school (Crowe et al., 2009; Wyner et al., 2007); lending to concerns about whether and how this may influence a student's perception of education and its ability to affect their future after school. Students from low SES homes face inequities in educational resources at home and inefficiencies in the allocation of resources at school that can contribute to overall lower academic performance (Chiu, 2016). Worth noting is that SES inequality impacts not only low SES students but negatively impacts students overall.

Famously known for her research on the growth mindset, Dweck (2016) explains that students who believe they can achieve through working hard, applying themselves, and utilizing educational strategies tend to achieve more than those with a fixed mindset. These beliefs are frequently passed on from parent to child, or at the very least, are influenced by parents and home environments shaped by socioeconomic status.

Background of the Problem

Research has established that low socioeconomic status has many adverse effects on students (Chiu, 2016; Crowe et al., 2009; Duncan & Brooks-Gunn, 2000). It is

essential to understand why those adverse effects exist and how educators can combat those negative effects to positively impact student attitudes toward education. Delving deeper into this subject and exploring students' perceptions of education and how it impacts their lives can provide essential information for educators to help close the educational opportunity gaps. Opportunity gaps are described by Flores (2007) as a shift from "looking at measures of educational outcomes to examining what students actually experience in schools results in a very different way of describing disparities among students in schools (p. 32). She further explains that the new frame focuses "attention to the fact that African American and Latino students are less likely than White students to have teachers who emphasize quality mathematics instruction and appropriate use of resources" (p. 32).

At a young age, students may not understand the importance of education and how school can influence future endeavors. Accordingly, they may not value or understand the weight that education has on their futures. Compared to adults, adolescents tend to have relatively poor abilities to delay gratification (Steelandt et al., 2012). Consequent to this, students often appear to take a short-sighted approach to life and demonstrate impulsivity. They appear to live in the moment and seek immediate rewards—Long-term rewards (e.g., obtaining gainful employment) may thus face being ignored in favor of short-term rewards (e.g., playing soccer with friends after school). What they may not see or value is how education and current decisions shape their futures. This study will explore whether socioeconomic status influences students' perceptions of how education impacts their futures after school. To understand the results

of the study, one must understand how socioeconomic status influences students' educations and homelives.

Coming from a home of low socioeconomic status can contribute to early struggles with skills related to literacy (Wagner et al., 2014). Several risk factors faced by students from low socioeconomic status households affect opportunities. These include but are not limited to access to libraries and higher-quality preschools and hardships at home such as family turmoil, homes with separated parents, and violence (Evans, 2004; Wagner et al., 2014). Such risk factors and others can gravely impact student opportunity, academic advantage, and literacy development, which may subsequently influence a student's perceptions and understanding of education's importance for their future career success. Research indicates that students from lower-income households typically have less opportunity to engage in enrichment programs outside their school (Burney & Beilke, 2008). These programs help enhance literacy skills that are universal and essential to success in school and life. These enrichment programs help build students' confidence, enhance their competence, build skills related to interaction among peers, and provide students with information on various topics. Students from lower socioeconomic status homes who do not have the opportunity to attend such programs may be at a disadvantage compared to their peers from homes of higher SES status. Further exacerbating the opportunity gap is the quality of the educator who is teaching the students. Flores (2007) and Wilkins and colleagues (2006) share that high-quality teachers are not equitably distributed across all economic classes or ethnic groups. Research states that these students are twice as likely to be taught by a teacher who has had just three years or less of teaching experience.

Parental involvement can be crucial in determining how a child values education. When parents expose their children to literacy and literacy-based activities at home, these activities have a positive impact on child development. Less interaction with children correlates to less guided reading practice and less vocabulary and language acquisition at home. In lower socioeconomic status homes, this is often the case as there are fewer guided reading materials, less access to reading materials and resources in and out of the home, and parents do value education but work numerous jobs, rendering them unavailable to interact with their children at the same levels as higher SES counterparts. They may be unavailable to provide reading support, or they may not have the educational background or skills to help their children. In a study that explored verbal and physical interactions between students and parents while reading picture books, Barnyak (2011) found a positive correlation with student motivation, vocabulary, and engagement in more frequent meaningful conversations.

Statement of the Problem

According to Atwell and colleagues (2019):

Low-income students made up 47.2 percent of the nation's graduating cohort in 2017, but nearly two-thirds of the nation's four-year non-graduates with an average graduation rate of 78.3 percent. The graduation rate gap between low-income and non-low-income students ranges from a high of 24.5 percentage points in Wyoming to a low of -2.7 percentage points in South Carolina. While most states have seen their graduation gaps between low-income and non-low income decline, 13 states have seen this gap increase (p. 19).

Their research also examines the correlation between the graduation rate of high school students and college readiness. They share that students from low-income homes are less likely to be on track to graduate on time and more likely not to be career and college-ready.

Further, the U.S. Census Bureau found related to post-secondary education, that "in 2020, 24.7 percent of people aged 25 and older without a high school diploma were in poverty…" (p. 18). Moreover, the poverty rate for people who did not hold a high school diploma was strikingly six times higher than for people holding at least a bachelor's degree. People who earned a "bachelor's degree had the lowest poverty rate among educational attainment groups in 2020" (p. 18). Taken together, it is clear that education plays a vital role in people's futures. The premise of the current work is that students' attitudes toward and perceptions of education play a role in their current and future successes. According to Hacieminoglu (2016) and Newhouse (1990), attitude influences human behavior, and "attitude is affected by personal opinion, and these opinions can be formed through personal life experiences and education" (Hacieminoglu, 2016, p. 36). This study thus aims to explore the nature of the relationship between the SES of secondary-aged students and their perceptions of education. While many of the studies discussed throughout this research examine these concepts through a quantitative approach, it is through the qualitative phenomenological approach that I will seek to understand and portray how students experience and perceive education and its ability to impact their future beyond grade school. Through the low-inference data collected, I gained an understanding of the lived experiences of these students from low-SES homes and how they view the importance of education as it pertains to their futures.

Theoretical Framework

To understand student perceptions and attitudes towards education and its influence on their lives, it is imperative to closely examine the theories and perspectives that will frame the research on which it is based. Many theoretical frameworks accommodate and are relevant to this research area. This research focuses on how student attitudes have been defined within the framework of social cognitive theory, theory of self-efficacy, and identity-based motivation theory. Each of these theories helps to frame the current research exploring the impact of socioeconomic status on students' perception of education's transformative potential. Future literature may look to explore other areas related to this topic through the lens of additional frameworks including emergent literacy theory and sociocultural theory.

Social Cognitive Theory and Self-efficacy Theory

Bandura's (1997) social cognitive theory defines self-efficacy as one's beliefs about his/her ability to fulfill a task. Specifically, this theory highlights the significant role of the social environment on motivation and learning (Schunk & Dibendetto, 2020; Schunk & Usher, 2012). This theory explores how individuals' behavior is determined and examines the social environments in which the behavior is exhibited. The social cognitive theory posits that goals motivate and lead to motivational outcomes for people (Bandura, 1986; 1997; Schunk & Dibendetto, 2020). Goals help to focus a person's efforts toward carrying out and completing a task. Students can build self-efficacy by working towards a goal and maintaining the belief that progress can be made toward a goal (Schunk, 2012; Schunk & Dibendetto, 2020).

Bandura's (1997) theory of self-efficacy is a subset of the social cognitive theory. Self-efficacy theory involves understanding students' beliefs and confidence in their

ability to complete tasks. Bandura (1997) suggests that students' perceptions of their abilities to complete a specific task influence their achievement and learning. It is suggested through the lens of this theory that if a student is confident in their abilities to perform a task, they may be more willing, motivated, and able to complete it, and their level of engagement may be greater (Bandura, 2006; Schunk & Dibendetto, 2020).

Identity-Based Motivation Theory

According to Destin and Oyserman (2010) identity-based motivation theory suggests that the motivation of an individual "is determined by the extent to which their active identities feel congruent with their current social contexts" (Silverman et al., 2021, p. 2). This theory further corroborates that students' backgrounds influence their feelings and understanding of their identities. Silverman and colleagues (2021) provide the example that if a lower-SES student views their teacher as perceiving their background as a foundation of strength to the student, the student regards their background as consistent with their success in school. Typically, students want to be successful academically, but their actual achievement does not always match this desire. Destin and Oyserman (2010) posit that structural influences impact this gap by shaping students' perceptions of what they can accomplish in the future. Identity-based motivation theory looks at how environments influence how people view themselves (Oyserman, 2014). Moreover, identity-based motivation theory underscores that both social class, as well as cultural contexts, impact people in theorizing that "identities influence the strategies people are willing to use to attain their goals and the meaning people make of experienced ease and difficulty" (Fisher et al., 2017, p. 61).

Summary

Research Question

This study aims to explore the following research question:

What are students' perceptions regarding education's ability to improve their future?

Definition of Terms

Attitudes - Implicit or explicit, unconscious, or conscious beliefs, feelings, reactions, an individual experiences towards a person, object, event, or phenomenon (Olufemi, 2012).

Diversity – According to the Oxford Dictionary, the definition of diversity is "the practice or quality of including or involving people from a range of different social and ethnic backgrounds and of different genders, sexual orientations, etc."

Opportunities Gap – "refers to the ways in which race, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, English proficiency, community wealth, familial situations, or other factors contribute to or perpetuate lower educational aspirations, achievement, and attainment for certain groups of students" (The Glossary of Education Reform).

Literacy – It is important to note that while there is not one core definition of literacy, literacy can be described as a person's ability to communicate, understand, gain, create, write, read, identify, and create knowledge across different environments, multiple contexts, and varying cultures.

Self-efficacy – One's belief in his capability to produce through his actions (Bandura, 1997).

Socio-economic Status (SES) – the definition of SES varies slightly depending on the literature that is being investigated. Common among the various definitions, there are

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varying factors that account for and make up SES. According to the National Forum on

Education Statistics (2015), SES includes a person's access to social, cultural, financial,

and human capital resources. Chen et al, (2018), share the Michigan State Department of

Education's definition of SES which is calculated based on three factors: family income,

parent's occupation, and parent's education level.

Student Performance – The extent to which a student has attained educational goals.

Qualitative – Research that is non-numerical and instead involves narrative data and

words. It involves an informative, interpretive, naturalist approach to collecting data.

Most qualitative research is conducted in natural settings, allowing the researcher to

interpret and make sense of a situation and experience. Data is typically obtained through

interviews, focus groups, observations, recordings in natural settings, case studies,

artifacts, and questionnaires. Qualitative research designs include narrative,

phenomenological, grounded theory, ethnography, and case studies.

CHAPTER 2 LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

This literature review comprehensively examines various factors related to socioeconomic status, the role those factors play, and the influence that those factors have on students' academic growth and experience. This literature review also comprehensively addresses the opportunity gap and why it is crucial and significant to understanding the results of this research study. Due to the lack of research on students' perceptions of education's ability to improve their future, this research aims to establish a relation between the students' perceptions of education's ability to improve their future after their school years and socioeconomic status. To appropriately examine this topic, it is crucial to gain a better understanding of the factors that impact student success related to socioeconomic status as well as the elements that contribute to student motivation or lack thereof. This literature review will look to inform on these areas to have a clear and thorough understanding of the data that is gathered, collected, and analyzed through the research process.

Organization of the Literature

This literature review aims to provide an understanding of how various factors may influence students' values and beliefs regarding education's ability to impact their future. This literature review closely analyzes the role that income and socioeconomic status have on students' education as well as the role played by the opportunity gap faced by lower-SES students. The literature review explores how parental involvement plays a role in students' academics. This research also examines how educators and educational

systems influence students' success, motivations, and beliefs and how socioeconomic status impacts these factors.

It can be said that students' futures are quite frequently impacted by their education in grade school. Whether a student chooses to go to college, trade school, or begin a career immediately upon graduating high school, their school achievement often influences their ability to become successful contributors to society. There are many factors to explore to understand what plays a role in students' value of education. This study particularly focuses on SES, but also accounts for a constellation of overlapping factors tangential to SES and how they play a role in students' thoughts, values, and beliefs toward education including but not limited to home situations, parental influences, culture, teachers' beliefs about students' abilities related to socioeconomic status, teacher-student rapport/relationships, and how stereotypes are embedded in society that influence and impact the values, beliefs, and success of students. With an understanding of the various impacts that socioeconomic status has on students related to their literacy experiences and academics, this study will explore students' perceptions of and attitudes toward education and how it plays a role in their future. Critically, this research establishes socioeconomic status as an important driver of perceptions and attitudes of the nature of the relationship between education and future success.

Opportunity Gap: What is it and Why is It Important

Flores (2007) explains it perfectly when she addresses the crux of what was viewed as the achievement gap. She, as well as Ladson-Billings (2006), explains that a shift in mindset from an achievement gap to an opportunities gap allows for researchers,

educators, and stakeholders to better understand and address the needs of students to close the gaps that exist. Flores (2007) writes:

> By casting light on the inequities of opportunities faced by low-income and African American and Latino students – less access to experienced and well qualified teachers, less access to high teacher expectations, and less per-student funding for their schools – the achievement gap is better understood as a manifestation of an underlying cause – the opportunity gap (p. 37).

Put simply, any gap in academic achievement, which is often evident among low-income, Latino, and African American students, can be attributed to disparities that exist in opportunities rather than inherent abilities. These disparities include but are not limited to, the expectations that teachers set for their students, per-student funding for the school, and the qualification of the educators. In the 1990s there was a narrowing of income differences among Black and White and Latino and White students. Even with this narrowing, disparities in education continued to grow. Research points to various factors that are behind this narrowing and fluctuation. The factors include but are not limited to SES, family background and situations, student behavior, and educational conditions. These factors only partially account for what was referred to as an achievement gap (Ladson-Billings, 2006; Lee, 2002). It is unclear what drives these shifts, and it is essential to understand that when reading this research study. Ladson-Billings (2006) firmly believes that an educational debt exists, and it is due to the compilation of moral decisions, policies, economic circumstances, and historical and sociopolitical decisions that define our society. To further emphasize this concept, I share some of her research and findings that are both shocking and disheartening. She shares what was once the

present-day amount spent in urban schools versus suburban schools and states that it "is telling a story about the value we place on the education of different groups of students" (p. 6).

> The Chicago public schools spend about $8,482 annually per pupil, while nearby Highland Park spends $17,291 per pupil. The Chicago public schools have an 87% Black and Latina/o population, while Highland Park has a 90% White population. Per pupil expenditures in Philadelphia are $9,299 per pupil for the city's 79% Black and Latina/o population, while across City Line Avenue in Lower Merion, the per-pupil expenditure is $17,261 for a 91% White population. The New York City public schools spend $11,627 per pupil for a student population that is 72% Black and Latina/o, while suburban Manhasset spends $22,311 for a student population that is 91% White (figures from Kozol, 2005; p. 6).

This data raises concerns about equity and access to resources in education. The data demonstrates disparities in the expenditures per pupil between Black and Latina/o students in urban areas compared to white students in affluent suburban areas. It also raises an area of concern regarding the possibility of an imbalance on the educational outcomes of the students from lower-SES homes.

It is Milner (2012) who suggests in his literature that we consider these questions in order to help reframe this shift in thinking to a mindset of the opportunity gap. He posits:

Consider, for example, four important questions regarding such a paradigm and mindset expansion: (a) To what extent is achievement synonymous with learning? (b) What does

it mean for one group of students to learn and achieve in one school community in comparison to another? (c) Who decides what it means to achieve, why, and how do we know? (d) How do we address the kind of learning and knowledge acquisition that never show up on achievement measures - including high-stakes tests? (p. 695).

By thinking in terms of these questions, one is forced to reconsider the traditional idea of an achievement gap. It allows for a more inclusive and holistic viewpoint on education and acknowledges the diversity of students, their learning experiences, and their learning outcomes. It is with this mindset that I ask you to approach this literature and research study, remembering that educational opportunity gaps exist, and educators need to be mindful of this in order to best meet the needs of their students. By acknowledging this concept, we can ensure better educational practices and a path to success for our students throughout their educational experience and beyond.

Income & Socioeconomic Status

According to the National Forum of Education Statistics (2015), "SES has been correlated with an individual's skill development, academic achievement, work and life outcomes, and overall psychological and behavioral well-being" (p. iv). There is an abundance of research that demonstrates a relationship between student achievement and socioeconomic status from childhood through adolescence and across various races (Aikens & Barbarin, 2008; Chen et al., 2018). Existing in the literature is also research and data to support the contrary, that socioeconomic status has no bearing on academic achievement (Chen et al., 2018; Ripple & Luthar, 2000). This research introduces beliefs regarding students' understanding of education's ability to impact their future as a factor that might explain these discrepant findings in prior literature. The research hopes to shed

light on these discrepancies and determine if students' perceptions of education are influenced by their SES status.

Socioeconomic status impacts many aspects of a child's upbringing including quality of childcare in and outside of the home, health, neighborhoods in which the family resides, home environments, and parent-child interactions. These factors influence the opportunities available to students which can potentially lead to achievement concerns for students in school. Within this literature review, it will become clear that many of these areas are interrelated, thus impacting one another. For example, less educated parents may result in parents working in lower-paying jobs, thus impacting salaries and SES. It is these factors that play a role in the success, or lack thereof, of students. Through this study, I gathered data that informed how these factors relate to students' perceptions, values, and beliefs regarding how students' futures are influenced by education.

White (1982) conducted a meta-analysis of approximately 200 studies which showcased a positive correlation between academic success and SES. Sirin (2005) conducted a similar meta-analysis of roughly 70 studies that indicated that there was not a significant relationship between SES and student achievement. Yet, additional studies demonstrated that "the lower children's SES is, the worse their academic achievement" (Chen et al., 2018, p. 2) and this was consistent across ages (Walker et al., 1994; Pungello et al., 1996). Rowe and Goldin-Meadow (2009) express the serious effects of SES on students. Students from higher SES families typically have a larger vocabulary than students from families of lower SES. This gap is established at the toddler age, grows larger until about age four, and then the gap becomes entrenched. Vocabulary is said to

be a significant predictor of academic success "and is a primary reason why low SES children enter school at greater risk for failure than their high SES peers" (p. 1). The effects of low SES are not limited to the home either as there exists a gap in access to school library resources due to how school funding is determined – being lower in areas of concentrated poverty (Pribesh et al., 2011). As I have emphasized continuously throughout this research study, I state again that these imbalances in students' abilities are not a result of their abilities but rather a result of the systemic challenges they face due to their lived experiences, the opportunities available to them, and their home-life circumstances. This is not indicative of what they are capable of in the future.

A study was conducted by Gayton (2010) in which the link between socioeconomic status and students' motivation with language learning was examined. The researcher interviewed teachers to uncover teachers' perceptions of students' attitudes toward language learning. Through these interviews, the researcher was able to gather data that displayed a connection between language-learning motivation and socioeconomic status as well as a link between socioeconomic status and general academic motivation. Gayton (2010) explains that the results of the study maintain Ausubel's (1968) theory and findings that in homes of lower SES, parents give less weight to education. This then, as stated by Gayton (2010), results in the students being "less academically predisposed" than their peers who come from homes where their parents value education (p. 26).

In another study, researchers demonstrate the consequences of poverty on the literacy experiences of students. Students coming from lower-income and lower SES-status homes experience early struggles with their literacy skills and research even shows

that poverty correlates with delayed letter recognition as well as delays in reading (Aikens & Barbarin 2008; Whitehurst & Lonigan, 1998; Wagner et al., 2014). The students who are products of lower-income homes tend to obtain language skills more slowly due to circumstances beyond their control and this does not reflect their innate ability or their potential. Aikens and Barbarin (2008) explain that the reading opportunity gap attributable to SES is multiply determined. Their literature discusses the different ways in which low SES might affect the differences in reading performance due to systemic issues associated with SES.

Additional studies point to concerns regarding word encounters of students who come from lower-income homes versus higher-income homes. Egalite (2016), shares that at the age of three, students whose parents receive public assistance are exposed to about a third of the words than that of their peers from higher-income homes.

There are many risk factors faced by students of low SES and lower-income homes that play a role in students' afforded opportunities. Among these risk factors are limited access to community libraries as well as limited or no access to higher-quality pre-school educational services for children (Wagner, et al., 2014). On the topic, Pribesh and colleagues (2011) argue that "if we hope to close achievement gaps between high and low socioeconomic groups, we must attend to the access gap in school libraries in high- and low-poverty schools" (p. 143). An additional obstacle faced by students residing in homes of lower income and lower SES is that there is less opportunity for them to be involved with enrichment programs outside of the school building (Burney & Beilke, 2008). Students in higher SES homes are at an advantage if they access enrichment programs that are made available to them as these programs provide students with skills

that they can generalize into the classroom setting which results in higher student achievement outcomes. These programs help to develop student competence and self-esteem as well as foster social skills. Turmoil, family separation, and more pandemonium in the home are also said to be factors that impact students living in homes of lower income (Evans, 2004). Important to note is that Burney & Beilke (2008) explain:

> High achievement increases the likelihood of attainment of postsecondary education; it is that level of attainment that is associated with increased lifetime earnings. Increased education is what will allow students to escape poverty and its limitations for themselves and future generations. Programs for gifted students have been criticized as favoring those with greater advantage. If we can truly provide advanced opportunity accompanied by the necessary support for high performance to students from low-income status, then gifted programs will be seen as the necessary vehicle for students of promise and future generations to escape poverty (p. 190).

This quote establishes the idea that education, specifically, high achievement and postsecondary education, helps students from low-SES homes break loose from the cycle of poverty. With this, the authors highlight the theory that achieving higher levels of education is correlated to increased salaries. It also emphasizes the idea that these students can overcome limitations that may have been imposed upon them due to their SES status. Addressing the idea that gifted programs favor students from higher-SES backgrounds, the literature suggests that with more accessibility to these programs and support, a pathway to success for low-SES students would be established.

Zhang et al, (2013) conducted a study in which they followed 262 students from various SES backgrounds from ages 4 to 9 to explore the relationship between SES and vocabulary, reading, and early phonological processing. Analysis of the data revealed a correlation between early childhood SES and vocabulary and phonological skills. In addition, the data showed that SES affected vocabulary abilities which affected the reading abilities of students by the end of third grade. In short, the study confirms that family SES is a crucial factor that drives reading skills as well as language. "SES is a relatively blunt barometer of a child's home literacy environment, especially when measured at a single point in time" (Zhang et al., 2013, p. 6). This dissertation adds much-needed nuance to the conversation surrounding the relationship between SES and education by highlighting the broad range of systemic challenges students face due to low SES. Solving any one of these factors in isolation would most likely fail to move the needle in overcoming student performance outcomes resultant from SES. Nevertheless, a primary concern is that opportunities provided to students are impacted by SES and put the higher-SES students at an advantage over the lower-SES students resulting in the research results demonstrated above.

Parental Influence

Hoover-Dempsey et al, (1987) suggest that parents in higher SES homes recognize the value of and role that education plays in their children's lives. Additionally, their study suggests that parents in lower-SES homes take less of a role in their children's educational endeavors than those of higher-SES homes who are said to play a more active role in supporting the school programs. Past research in the tradition deficit models that points to the influence that parents, and relatedly, SES have on students' regard for

education. It is believed that students with parents who have higher levels of completed formal education have a stronger work ethic as well as more positive ability beliefs than do peers whose parents have lower levels of education (Joan & Smrekar, 2009; Kainuwa et al., 2013). Kainuwa and colleagues (2013) share that children from families of higher SES and educated families display better academic performance than their peers from lower SES homes with less educated parents. The reasoning behind this is that children from higher SES and more educated families tend to have more support that fosters academic growth. They typically have more guidance and structure from their parents related to academics in the home. Relatedly, they report that, "children's test scores are lowest when poverty persists across the generations, and highest when material advantage is long-lasting" (p. 6). Rowe and Goldin-Meadow (2009) posit that how parents converse with their children "explains some of the relation between SES and child vocabulary" (p. 1). Parents from higher SES groups tend to utilize more "diverse vocabulary" and more sophisticated language when talking with their children than parents of lower SES. These discrepancies may be a consequence of an opportunity gap that parents of students themselves faced, and sadly it seems to be self-perpetuating in that the lack of adequate parental support creates an additional opportunity gap for students themselves. This can potentially create an insidious and difficult cycle to break—one in which inadequate parental support for education is essentially passed from generation to generation through low-SES families.

Parents' mindsets and responses to student failures contribute to students' beliefs about their abilities. Haimovitz and Dweck (2016) divulge that students of parents who view failure as debilitating end up having a fixed mindset – meaning that they believe

they are unable to develop their intelligence. When a student has a fixed mindset, they do not believe that they can grow and improve their intelligence. A growth mindset allows them to understand that through hard work and dedication to their work, they can grow and manipulate their intelligence. Haimovitz and Dweck suggest that a parent's response to a student's failures influences a student's ability to maintain a growth mindset thus impacting the ability for the student to persevere through their academic tasks and grow as learners. Parents' beliefs about their child's abilities are critical to student achievement and parental involvement plays a role in student motivation. Findings from research conducted by O'Sullivan and Howe (1999) showcase the fundamental role that parents' positive beliefs regarding their child's ability play in their success. Such findings partially motivate the current research by suggesting the critical importance of mindsets on student outcomes over SES directly.

The literature of Baker et al (1997), refers to the findings of the Early Childhood Project which was a study that was funded by the National Reading Research Center as well as the National Institute of Child and Health and Human Development. The literature shares insight into urban children from a variety of sociocultural groups and their development of literacy. An ecological inventory was completed by parents that displayed different aspects of children's print-related experiences at home. Part of this inventory "showed the extent to which parents provided opportunities for children to learn to value reading" (p. 71). In rating the frequency of engagement with books, daily book engagement occurred in 90% of middle-income homes as reported by parents. This was significantly higher than the 52% of low-income parents reporting that their children are engaged in daily book activities. Also salient was the 78% of middle-income families

reporting that their children independently interacted with books versus the 34% reported by low-income families. Further, Baker and colleagues explain that:

> Middle-income families tend to show greater endorsement of the cultural theme of literacy as a source of entertainment than do low-income families, whereas low-income families tend to give more attention to the theme of literacy as a skill to the deliberately cultivated (p. 72).

Beyond this, they even state that middle-income children had such positive interactions and experiences with books that they frequently use books as entertainment. This differed from the children from low-income homes where children were less likely to use books and literacy as a source of entertainment. Again, important to acknowledge that this may be a direct result of not having the same resources easily accessible and available to them as their peers from higher-SES homes. This is not necessarily due to a disinterest in reading or an inability to read. Baker and colleagues (1996) posit that there is a correlation between students' home literacy experiences and their engagement in reading independently. A predictor of literacy development may be students' literacy interests and motivation (Dunning et al., 1994). Greaney and Hegarty (1987) found evidence to support that students who had a more positive attitude toward reading also engaged in more leisurely reading activities than did students with a less positive attitude toward reading. The current work may help explain the apparent relationship between SES and parent influence on student achievement and academic performance. Accordingly, interventions can be designed to address students' perceptions of education's ability to impact their future.

Educator Influence, Student Motivation, and Socioeconomic Status

Stereotypes centered around SES and social class are pervasive throughout society. One such problematic stereotype is that wealthier people are more intelligent than those who are less wealthy. The different stereotypes that exist around SES negatively impact students' self-confidence and create anxiety among students. SES-based stereotypes are said to influence lower-SES student performance from as early as elementary school. Just as salient is the data that reveals that lower-income people have lower self-esteem, and lower self-evaluations of their IQ (Durante & Fiske, 2017). Further stereotyping of lower-SES families includes the stereotype that education is not valued by low-income parents and that educators feel that poorer students are linguistically deficient (Durante & Fiske, 2017; Gorski, 2012).

Over the course of many decades, various social and educational researchers have examined how educational institutions, seemingly unknowingly, have generated a set of obstacles that impede the success of lower-SES students. This same learning environment is said to support and foster the learning, achievement, and outcomes of students of higher-SES backgrounds (Autin et al., 2019; Croizet & Claire, 1998; Stephens et al., 2012). It seems that educational settings play a role in the lower performance of students from lower-SES backgrounds performing lower than their peers of higher-SES backgrounds. Teachers' biases result in lower performance for lower-SES students as well as more referrals to special education and varied treatment of lower-SES families versus higher-SES families (Durante & Fiske, 2017). This is not to say that low-SES students are any less capable, rather this research serves to highlight and address the

systematic issues around SES (e.g., access to educational resources) that may result in differences in academic performance.

In what seems to be a relatively unique perspective on the topic, Silverman and colleagues (2021) suggest that while there are many barriers faced by students from lower SES when it comes to education, they are in fact at an advantage in some ways. They posit that students from lower SES homes possess "unique skills and perspectives" than their higher SES peers due to their lived experiences. It is explained that these skills and perspectives can help students advance academically, however, there is a negative stigma that exists around students from lower SES. This stigma tends to present undesirable consequences that stand in the way of the student's success (Croizet & Claire, 1998; Silverman et al., 2021). Interestingly, research has shown that students of lower SES are aware of their teachers' beliefs and expectations of them (Silverman et al., 2021; Sorhagen, 2013). Meaning that students are cognizant of their teachers' thoughts and feelings toward their abilities and what the teachers feel the students are capable of achieving. Teachers often view their students of higher SES as more capable than the students from lower-SES homes (Autin et al., 2019; Durante & Fiske, 2017; Harvey et al., 2016; Silverman et al., 2021). Research illustrates a belief that students from homes of lower SES are "less capable because the skills, resources, and perspectives that are common among these students are not in line with those that are privileged" (Silverman, et al., 2021, p. 2). Despite this, it is suggested that students from lower SES can leverage their strengths that are background specific such as being able to overcome challenging situations (Silverman et al., 2021; Yosso, 2005). This again, relates to one of the complexities that exists in the opportunity gap. Flores (2007) addresses the issues behind

teachers' perceptions and beliefs regarding students and how this creates further issues in being able to move the needle in the right direction for our lower-SES students.

In their study, 125 teacher participants completed a voluntary strengths-based learning session that addressed the values and strengths of lower-SES students. Teachers were split up into four groups and each group was assigned a survey to complete the survey. Some of the educators completed the survey two weeks before the training while other teachers were directed to complete the survey a few weeks after the session. The data analyzed from these surveys indicated that students' awareness and viewpoint of their teachers' beliefs and values about the students' backgrounds were correlated to students' identity-based motivational outcomes. Silverman and colleagues (2021) theorize that students from lower-SES homes are more aware of and vulnerable to their teachers' beliefs. These results provide researchers with data that allows them to suggest that teachers' beliefs regarding their students "matter more for motivation of students whose identities are regularly stigmatized in education" compared to their peers from higher-SES homes (p. 7). Lastly, this same study shows that there is a relationship between high school students' perceptions of their educators' beliefs regarding their background-specific strengths and their grades. Flores (2007) shared "Teaching strategies that provide opportunities for students to learn cooperatively rather than competitively will allow students to use their cultural background to their advantage" (p. 38). This approach acknowledges the diversity that may exist in the classroom and promotes inclusivity by capitalizing on students' cultural backgrounds and strengths.

To further support the idea that teachers' expectations, actions, and beliefs influence student performance is research conducted by Rist (1970). Results of this

research indicate that students from higher social classes were given preferential treatment by the teacher. Additionally, in Sorhagen's (2013) research, participants took part in a study that yielded results supporting the idea that a high school student's academic achievement is shaped by the expectations of teachers starting at an early age. The data analysis also establishes that "high school students whose first-grade teachers underestimated their abilities performed significantly worse" when it came to math, reading comprehension, and vocabulary knowledge on standardized testing (p. 472). The data also reveals that students whose abilities were overestimated performed better than anticipated. Taken together, it is clear that student performance is, at least partially, the result of teachers' attitudes toward and perceptions of their students. Next, I explore additional research that is needed to understand the mechanisms by which these attitudes and perceptions exert their influence and how they interact with SES.

White students often feel more supported and included than students than Latino students who express feelings of neglect, alienation, and exclusion regarding their academic environments. This can be directly related to teachers' beliefs about a students' home-life and their abilities leading the teacher to a feeling of helplessness. This feeling and lower expectations set by the teacher can result in ineffective teaching practices and reinforce stereotypes that exist. The lower expectations can then result in limited opportunities for students for students to engage with challenging materials. Not only is there a concern regarding teaching strategies and practices, but there is also a concern surrounding assessment practices. Research shows that teachers with a majority of Latino and African American students are likely to assess students using multiple choice or

lower-level cognitive objectives compared to teachers teaching in higher-SES areas with a predominantly White student body (Getz, 1997; Flores, 2007; Irvine & York, 1993).

Of additional concern, "schools with more low-income students and/or a large proportion of Latino or African American students have problems retaining highly qualified teachers. Teacher salary plays a role since districts with fewer financial resources are not able to compete with teachers" (Flores, 2007, p. 37). In other words, teachers' salaries are impacted by the funding allotted to school districts which is typically attached to local property taxes and funding formulas. Schools that are in areas with lower property values and thus lower taxes or that receive less funding likely have fewer resources to provide competitive salaries to teachers. Not offering a competitive salary will influence the district's ability to retain teachers that highly qualified educators. Districts that are considered wealthier usually have more access to financial resources thus allowing them to offer more attractive salaries. The disparity that exists in teacher pay can lead to challenges for schools with higher proportions of low-income students in being able to hire and retain more experienced teachers. This further amplifies the obstacles faced by these schools and plays into the opportunity gap.

Even at the university level, SES plays a significant role in students' motivation. Browman and Destin (2016) uncover data revealing that when university students view their school setting as being supportive of socioeconomic diversity, students are more confident in engaging in academic tasks. Additionally, their three experiments indicate that a university's organization and ability to support diverse socioeconomic backgrounds play a role in student academic motivation. Further research in the area of university students, motivation, and SES discloses that "one key psychological contributor is the

perception that school is connected to reaching a desirable future, characterized by stable

employment and a respectable income" (Browman et al., 2017, p. 45). Motivating

students at the university level is the idea of improving earning power by pursuing higher

education (Browman et al., 2017; CIRP, 2015). When made aware of the relationship

between income and education, students were more motivated and eager to follow

through with and complete school tasks (Destin & Oyserman, 2010). In their studies,

Browman and colleagues (2017) found that students' perceptions of socioeconomic

mobility have implications for their ability to overcome academic challenges and difficult

tasks. Their data reveals the significance of one's beliefs about their ability to have a

future with financial success if one perseveres through academic challenges. Baker and

colleagues (1996) posit that there is a correlation between students' home literacy

experiences and their engagement in reading independently. Again, this is not a result of

the students' deficient abilities, instead, it is a consequence of the opportunity gap that

exists due to the systemic factors faced by students from lower-SES homes. This

information needs to be considered to further the success of students by capitalizing on

the areas of strength they have, the diversity they bring to the classroom, and how their

backgrounds can enhance the learning experience.

Student-Teacher Rapport/Relationships and Impact of SES

As mentioned in previous sections of this chapter, low academic motivation can

be linked to students of low-income families. This happens to be frequently reported by

teachers as a significant problem within the classrooms (Bridgeland et al., 2013; Scales et

al., 2020; Yeager et al., 2014). While typically students become more motivated

throughout their academic career, this motivation tends to decline for those from less

affluent families as explained by Skinner and colleagues (2012) and as discussed by Scales and coauthors (2020). There is research that supports and highlights the significant role that student-teacher relationships have in influencing and impacting student achievement and motivation toward their academics. Within the research, two main focuses of student-teacher relationships are highlighted. These focuses include teachers demonstrating a level of care for their students and teachers setting high expectations for their students in the area of performance. Further, research indicates that positive and strong student-teacher relationships are a contributing factor in student engagement, academic outcomes, and improved motivation. This is particularly true among students who are from low-income households. These strong and important relationships seem to be less common among secondary-aged students (Roorda et al., 2011; Scales et al., 2020; Wentzel, 2002). A study conducted by Fitzpatrick and colleagues (2015) resulted in data demonstrating that kindergarten students who are recognized as disadvantaged by their teachers were 32% less likely to report having a positive relationship with their teachers many years later. The idea of relationships between students and teachers will be considered as it impacts students from lower SES homes when examining students' perceptions of education's ability to impact their future.

Recognizing "Funds of Knowledge"

The aforementioned literature and this research study do not undermine the prior work that communicates the value of diversity, nor does it suggest that this is the only approach. While the previously cited literature is crucial to approaching and understanding the results of this literature study, it is necessary and fitting to acknowledge the valuable insights and perspectives afforded to us when we shy away

from the deficit model. Both lenses provide information that aids in understanding the results of this study as well as the limitations and implications.

The literature of Rennie and Ortlieb (2013) recognizes the empowerment, strength, and agency among students from low-SES homes. The authors share that the purpose of their paper is to reframe the way in which people view diversity as well as to offer a lens that establishes the positive benefits and impacts diversity has within the classroom. To understand their literature and the literature they cite, one must recognize how diversity is defined from the educational vantage point. Diversity, through this viewpoint, and according to Rennie and Ortlieb (2013) refers to various characteristics, backgrounds, and experiences among students in the educational setting. Taking it a step further, we delve into what those characteristics encompass, which include but are not limited to SES, race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, gender, preferred learning styles, language spoken, religious beliefs, and physical abilities.

They argue that educators need to accept a new way of thinking and approaching diversity within the classroom to address, properly educate and meet students where they are. Additionally, effort has to be made on the part of the educators to "better connect schools to outside lives of children" through what is coined "funds of knowledge". "Funds of knowledge" is defined as "historically, accumulated and culturally developed bodies of knowledge and skills essential for household of individual functioning and well-being" (Moll et al., 1992, p. 133). Recognizing these funds of knowledge allows for a connection between the curriculum being taught and the lived experiences of the students that make up the classroom (Thomson, 2006). With this idea of "funds of knowledge" we consider the array of skills, knowledge, and experiences that each

individual student holds. We recognize that these attributes were gained through their backgrounds both culturally and familial and educators need to accept that this diversity enhances their classroom. The concept of "funds of knowledge" emphasizes the importance of recognizing and leveraging the diverse backgrounds and varied experiences that students bring with them to the classroom. To understand the role that diversity has within the educational setting, the Rennie and Ortlieb (2013) create an analogy to entrepreneurial companies and the diverse group of employers that join forces to "contribute to the mutual gains and benefits" (p. 214) explaining that it is uncommon that one person alone would be involved with a large task that requires the minds and skills of many. They also make a claim that counterproductive and counterintuitive to success is the idea that diversity relates to deficits. This is the mindset that they are trying to shift from and to create a realization that with embracing diversity we can capitalize on students' experiences, strengths, and agencies to further enhance the academic experience for all.

They expand on this idea by referencing three children, one whose family moves constantly, one who is coming from a wealthy upper-class and higher-SES background, and one who resides in a large city. Each brings with them unique experiences, skills, and understandings and with this may create a challenge for the teacher to create lessons to meet each of their diverse backgrounds. What the authors emphasize is the idea that instead of looking at this as a hinderance, educators need to see this as an opportunity. This allows for a different type of engagement that can hone in on the unique knowledge that the students each possess as well as their individualized interests that are formed from their experiences. Volman and Gilde (2021) recognize that students may perform

below what they are capable of due to discontinuities between their home experiences and school experiences. They indicate that it is the theory of "funds of knowledge" that creates a focus on the competences of students and draws back from the former (Esteban-Guitart & Moll, 2014; Moll et al., 1992; Volman & Gilde, 2021). "It makes a plea for building on the skills and knowledge that students acquire in their families, communities, peer groups and through social media and that may not be recognized by teachers, when these are from different social-cultural backgrounds than their students" (Volman & Gilde, 2021, p. 1). The positive outcomes that result from this are crucial and perhaps may help to redefine students' perspectives toward education's ability to enhance future outcomes for students.

CHAPTER 3 METHODS AND PROCEDURES

The purpose of this study is to examine students' perceptions regarding education's ability to improve people's futures. Within this study, through a qualitative research approach, I investigated and explored socioeconomic status and students' attitudes towards education. The qualitative research question guiding this study is:

What are students' perceptions regarding education's ability to improve people's future?

What is Qualitative Research?

Simply stated, qualitative research is data that is presented in the form of words as opposed to quantitative research where data is represented in numbers (Punch, 2013). In other words, and as defined by Aspers and Corte (2021) qualitative research design can be described as "an iterative process" that helps to make new and "significant distinctions resulting from getting closer to the phenomenon studied" (p. 139). Aspers and Corte (2021) further explain the process of qualitative research as heavily relying on social interactions, participation, and contributions from people. Creswell (2013) explains the qualitative research design best by stating that:

Qualitative research begins with assumptions and the use of interpretive/theoretical frameworks that inform the study of research problems addressing the meaning of individuals or groups ascribed to a social or human problem. To study this problem, qualitative researchers use an emerging qualitative approach to inquiry, the collection of data in a natural setting, sensitive to the people and places under study, and data analysis that is both inductive and deductive and establishes patterns of themes. The final written report or

presentation includes the voices of participants, the reflexivity of the researcher, and its contributions to the literature or a call for change (p.44).

Qualitative research involves data collection in a natural setting with a focus on sensitivity to the people and the place at the focus of the research. The role of the researcher in this type of approach is to identify and establish patterns and themes within the data sets. The researcher must then present the findings ensuring that the participant's voice is clear and that the information presented is reflective of the participants' experiences and perspectives. As will be discussed in greater detail below, the researcher must employ reflexivity with an awareness of their own possible biases that may exist. Qualitative researchers collect their data using words also known as nonnumeric data. This research design does not have a single reality but rather it has multiple perspectives and realities based on the research questions and participants involved in the student. It is a scientific approach that explores a specific phenomenon.

Phenomenological Research Design

This qualitative study will implement the method of phenomenology. The phenomenological approach closely examines individuals' experiences, examining in detail what is experienced by the participant and how it is experienced (Wertz, 2011). Specifically, this approach explores a phenomenon and how multiple individuals experience the phenomenon (Anderson & Spencer, 2002; Creswell & Poth, 2018). Phenomenology examines how individuals interpret their experiences. Part of the phenomenological approach is recognizing that personal interpretation plays an integral role in shaping individuals' subjective experiences. A significant and key component of phenomenology is the idea that the phenomenological approach puts a great deal of focus

on the consciousness of the subjects of the research study (Aspers, 2006). This research approach asserts that the fundamental truth about human experiences is only able to be retrieved through inner subjectivity (Flood, 2010; Thorne, 1991). This means that understanding the human experience and the world is rooted in these subjective experiences and perceptions. Phenomenology focuses on these inner experiences of people in order to uncover meaning in their experiences.

There are two types of approaches that researchers consider when utilizing the phenomenology research approach: hermeneutical phenomenology and transcendental phenomenology. Creswell and Poth (2018) describe both types of phenomenology approaches in detail explaining that the transcendental approach concentrates on the description of participants' experiences. They define hermeneutical phenomenology to be an interpretation of the experiences of the participants.

For the purpose of this research study, the transcendental approach was employed. Transcendental phenomenology requires the researcher to set aside any predetermined notions they have regarding the topic and research question. Edmond Husserl, known for his work on transcendental phenomenology (TPh), is cited by numerous authors interested in and employing this methodology. Sheehan (2014) describes Husserl's approach to literature as a philosophical approach. This approach seeks to understand the experiences of humans (Moustakas, 1994; Sheehan, 2014). Both authors explain the process known as epoche, a fundamental principle of TPh that requires the researcher to suspend or set aside any preconceived ideas or assumptions that may be held by the researcher. "Moustakas noted that epoche is a conscious process of identification and subsequent quarantine of naturally occurring thought patterns" (Sheehan, 2014, p. 11).

By doing this, the researcher is able to proceed with data collection with a clear perspective, or as Sheehan (2014) refers to it as approaching through "unclouded glasses" meaning that they are free from or aware of biases that may exist thus ensuring that the information that is gathered is not misrepresented in any way.

The rationale for the decision to use the transcendental phenomenology research approach is that this research study aims to recognize and comprehend the experiences of the students with relation to SES and their perceptions towards education and its ability to influence their future after school. Wojnar and Swanson (2007) outline the key components of the data analysis of research being conducted using descriptive phenomenological research which include the steps of bracketing, analyzing, intuiting, and describing. These steps occur throughout the entire process and aid the researcher in having a clear, thorough, and accurate understanding of the phenomenon. It is Moustakas's (1994) research that explains the process of bracketing related to phenomenology. This process involves the researcher putting aside preconceptions and assumptions related to the research topic and research questions.

In this study, I explored the students' perceptions and attitudes toward education and how it impacts their futures. Specifically, I was interested in identifying and understanding more about students' perceptions of education's ability to influence their future and SES status. It is the job of the researcher to portray what all of the participants have in common regarding their experience with the phenomenon (Creswell & Poth, 2018). This study closely examined commonalities in the participants' attitudes. I analyzed the data by looking at quotes, words, and phrases from the interviews of each of the participants as well as information from their registration packets, and various data

points gathered from the classroom observations. This data was combined into themes that helped to portray how and why the students perceive education in the manner that they relate to their futures. To collect data, I employed the phenomenological approach and used interviews with individuals as well as documents, work samples, and observations. The phenomenological approach would analyze data for significant statements and descriptions of the phenomenon.

Participants

For this study, the participants were chosen from one Title I funded district on Long Island, New York. It is important to understand what a Title I funded school is to better understand more about the district from which the participants were chosen. According to the New York State Education website, Title I is a federal program that offers districts with a high percentage of students from low-income families supplemental financial assistance. The purpose of this is "to provide all children a significant opportunity to receive a fair, equitable, high-quality education and to close educational achievement gaps" (Title I, part a). Funds for Title I are allocated based on a "four statutory formulas" that is centered around census poverty data and the amount that education costs in each state. Local educational agencies, also known as LEA, focus the Title I monies on schools with the largest percentage of students from low-income homes.

> If a Title I school is operating a targeted assistance program, the school provides
> Title I services to children who are failing, or most at risk of failing, to meet
> challenging State academic standards. Schools in which children from low-
> income families make up at least 40 percent of enrollment are eligible to use Title

I funds to operate schoolwide programs that serve all children in the school in order to raise the achievement of the lowest-achieving students (nysed.gov).

According to the information from nysed.gov, schools with at least 40% of the total enrollment, have the option to use their funds from Title I to execute a schoolwide program. This program would be to benefit the entire school body as opposed to just the students who are identified as at risk or failing. Such a program would intend to raise levels of achievement for all students. A Title I school may also provide services to failing students or those in jeopardy of failing, or those who are a greater risk of academic failure. These services include but are not limited to extra instruction, counseling, and academic support.

The students recruited for this study were from a Title I funded district in which more than 82% of the student population comes from families of lower SES (defined by the district as students eligible for free and reduced lunch; see Chapter 4 for expanded explanation). Student participants come from homes with similar incomes but may differ in familial backgrounds and parent occupations. They were drawn from the district's free and reduced lunch eligibility list. The participants included five eighth-grade students from whom I interviewed, observed, and collected teacher-provided work samples after receiving parental and student consent for them to participate in the study. In agreeing to allow their children to participate, they were made aware of and agreed to my need to access their registration packets on file in the school district. In these registration packets, I found information regarding income, parent occupation, previous residence, parents' education, student's previous education if any, number of people residing in the household, and other like items.

Role of the Researcher

The very first step I completed was receiving permission from the district superintendent to conduct my research and collect data from students in the district. I received a letter from the superintendent stating that she had granted this permission (Appendix A). For this proposed study, consent forms (Appendix B) were created that required a parent/guardian to sign for students to participate in the study. The purpose of the consent form was to outline the intention of the research study. The form reviewed the confidential manner in which the research was conducted, and it explained the role of the participant. Further, the letter explicitly stated that a participant could choose to rescind their decision to participate in the study at any time. The students also signed a similar consent form (Appendix C) that explained, in terms and language easily understood by them, what the purpose of the study was, what their participation would entail, and that they could rescind their participation at any point. I also generated questions to use in interviews with the participants (Appendix D). I conducted the interviews and observations as well as transcribed the interviews. Additionally, I analyzed and coded the data looking for patterns across the data that help to better understand how the students portray their experiences with literature and education.

A researcher must be able to employ reflexivity to acknowledge biases in their work when analyzing data. Reflexivity incorporates the researcher's ability to be aware, transparent, and forthcoming (Lichtman, 2013). Reflexivity will be of paramount concern for me at every stage of the research process including but not limited to data analysis, creating the interview, and collecting the data. I will need to be very deliberate in applying reflectivity so that my research agenda is not being guided by my experiences.

As a researcher, recognizing these biases is essential to the success of my proposed research study. A key component of descriptive phenomenology is being able to set aside these preconceptions. Thus, bracketing will be used to view the phenomena clearly with acknowledgment of the biases and an understanding of this to not allow them to cloud the analysis and understanding of the data (Wojnar & Swanson, 2007).

Procedures

I began my research study by obtaining permission from the school to use students from their student body as participants for this research study (Appendix A). Following receipt of permission, I selected my participants randomly from the list of 8th-grade students who were eligible for free and reduced lunch. Upon selection, I called each parent/guardian to explain my research and to ask if they would allow their child to participate in my study. Once I received verbal consent, I requested written permission from a parent/guardian for the students to participate in the study (Appendix B) and consent from the students as well (Appendix C). Upon receiving signed consent for participation from both the parent and the student, I acquired the registration packets of each student. I thoroughly reviewed all documents in the registration packet and collected and coded data for common themes. Once the registration packets were reviewed, the students were informed of a date and time for which the interview was scheduled to take place. At the specific date and time, each student reported to my office where they met with me in a face-to-face and 1:1 setting. Prior to beginning interviews, the interviewees were reminded that their interviews were to be recorded. After all of the interviews were finished, the interviews were carefully transcribed, and then data was coded as described in detail below. Following the interviews, I contacted the teachers of each student to

arrange an appropriate time and date to observe them. The observations took place in one

47-minute period per student. Upon completing the observations, I reviewed the

information and data obtained and determined how it impacted and aided the research.

Qualitative Data Collection and Analysis

The data collected for this research study included interviews, artifacts, and

observations. Each type of data collection provided a unique and different perspective

related to the research question.

Why Use Observations?

Observations provide the researcher with a way of gaining meaningful insight into

specific settings and behaviors of the participants (Busetto et al., 2020). As previously

shared in the discussion surrounding the theoretical frameworks that guide this research,

Schunk and Dibendetto (2020) and Schunk and Usher (2012) emphasize the importance

of the social environment on learning and motivation. The Social Cognitive Theory

examines how the social environment influences the behavior of individuals. Thus, a

central tenet of the Social Cognitive Theory is observational learning. People learn

through observation of others' behaviors and the outcomes of those behaviors. In this

situation, observations provide me with insight into the specific classroom and learning

settings of the students. In these observations, I was provided with a firsthand account of

how the participants interact with their learning environment. I can see how they

responded to the various stimuli around them and how their interactions and behaviors

may have been influenced by those stimuli. Conducting these observations provided me

with the opportunity to identify any patterns in behavior as well as patterns in social

interactions that align with the concepts described by the Social Cognitive Theory.

Two types of observations can take place, non-participant, in which the observer is an outsider looking in, and participant in which the observer is part of the setting that is being observed. For this research study, I would be a non-participant as I would not be an active member of the classroom. As an observer, I could either take notes on everything or I could take notes on pre-determined parts of what is taking place within the classroom. These notes will be typed on the computer while observing to ensure a fast and easy way to collect information. After conducting the interviews, these observation notes were transcribed and coded for commonalities among the data collected across the various observations. A researcher may choose to conduct observations as a way to lessen the distance between the researcher and the participants. By conducting observations, the researcher may potentially discover topics that were not initially regarded or realized as relevant. Additionally, the researcher may gain "deeper insights into the real-world dimensions of the research problem at hand" (Busetto et al., 2020 p. 3).

Why Conduct Interviews?

A researcher may choose to conduct interviews as a way of collecting data for a qualitative research study. Interviews provide the researcher with the ability to gain insight into the subject's experiences as well as their opinions on specific topics. This differs from the data that is collected from an observation in that when conducting an observation data collected focuses on facts and behaviors of the subject versus the data that is collected from an interview allowing the researcher to understand the participants' subjective experiences and viewpoints on a specific topic. Interviews can be conducted in various manners including structured interviews, semi-structured interviews, and open conversation. Interviews can be videotaped, or recorded, or the researcher can take notes

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while conducting the interview (Busetto et al., 2020). Videotaping or recording is often the preferred method as it allows the researcher the ability to focus on the interview and conversation as opposed to being concerned about taking notes or missing an important piece of information.

As part of this qualitative research study, I conducted interviews with five students of one school district on Long Island. The interviews occurred over two days to ensure enough time was allotted for each interview. Each interview was anticipated to last about an hour to an hour and a half however, when executed, they were much shorter in length. The interviews were conducted in my office. The purpose of the interviews was to provide me with information and insight regarding students' perceptions of education and its ability to improve people's futures. The interviews provided insight into how and if students internalize the importance of education. They allowed me to understand the types of role models the students have, as well as provided me with information regarding their motivations, interest in education, and how they feel education will help them in their futures. The study aimed to understand whether and why education is important to students and how they view education's potential impact on their futures. The interviews helped me to parse out whether any differences in performance based on SES are the result of differences in present ability or motivation.

The interviews were recorded with the permission of the person being interviewed. Following the interview, the recordings were transcribed. Once each transcription was complete, the information was coded for commonalities that surfaced. Similarly, to the methods described by Butina (2015), I began by organizing and preparing the data for a closer more in-depth review. I gained a general understanding of

the data before beginning a thorough and comprehensive coding process. In this coding process, which consists of reading and re-reading the collected data, categories and themes emerged. Concurrently with coding and processing the data into themes and categories, I was able to interpret the data for a complete and thorough understanding of what the data reveals concerning the research questions. Additionally, any artifacts provided to me by the teachers were coded and grouped based on what their purpose was and what they represented to the study. Creswell and Poth (2018) define coding by indicating that "coding involves aggregating the text or visual data into small categories of information, seeking evidence from the code from different databases being used in a study, and then assigning a label to the code" (p. 190).

In addition to conducting, recording, and coding the interviews, I engaged in observations of students within the classroom in the subject areas of English Language Arts or mathematics. I observed each student one time for 47 minutes each, in one of the aforementioned subject areas. During these observations, I paid close attention to students' focus and engagement, their interactions with their peers and teacher, as well as their interactions with the work. I took notes on students' engagement with the lesson and whether there seemed to be an understanding of the importance of the work based on their level of attention to the lesson and tasks. I collected student work as artifacts for the research study and analyzed their level of completion of the work as well as accuracy as marked by the teacher and additional teacher comments that may have been present on the documents. One last factor of data collection involved reviewing students' registration packets for school. In the registration packets, I found information about household income, parent employment, previous schools attended, and other information

related to the students' backgrounds. This information helped me to gain a clearer understanding of the lived experience of students and their SES status.

Triangulation and Reflexivity

Triangulation

To help mitigate biases, triangulation, the process in which the researcher uses multiple and different sources to corroborate evidence, needs to be implemented (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Mathison, 1988). This strategy would be utilized to crosscheck information through the use of multiple sources of data collection (Johnson, 1997). To ensure validity within my research and data collection, I used low-inference descriptors such as verbatim direct quotes provided to me by the participants (Johnson, 1997). In other words, triangulation requires using various sources and/or methods to gather data on the same phenomenon to enhance the reliability of the data collected. For this research study and to ensure triangulation, I had four points of data collection including student interviews, teacher-provided student artifacts, student observations in the classroom, and access to student registration packets. The student interviews allowed me to gather first-hand accounts of students' experiences, perspectives, and opinions related to how education may impact their future outcomes. This provides insights into the students' thoughts allowing me to gain a deeper understanding of the phenomenon. Teacher-provided artifacts were obtained from teachers as objective evidence of students' progress and achievement which compliments the subjective insights provided through the interview process. Student observations were conducted which allowed me to view their behaviors and interactions with their teachers, peers, and the activities in the classroom. This observational data provided some depth in understanding students' experiences

firsthand in the classroom. The student registration packets supplied information on

demographics, SES status and other background information. This information allowed

for an understanding of the characteristics and backgrounds of the students and

strengthened the thoroughness of this analysis and study.

Reflexivity

Reflexivity refers to the researcher needing to be self-aware of potential biases

that would impact their research and conclusions (Johnson, 1997). I also employed

reflexivity and demonstrated self-awareness in recognizing how my current position in

my workplace presents potential biases that can affect the research process. I am

cognizant of these preconceptions and ensure that these biases are controlled for and

monitored to ensure the validity of my research. These steps helped to guarantee validity

in the research and data gathered in this phenomenological research study. Reliability

refers to the consistency of data collection and measurement and the lack of error that

exists in the data. To ensure reliability within this research study, I used recording

devices to record the interviews as part of the qualitative research portion of this study.

Research Bias

The district in which I am an administrator is unique for a variety of reasons. To

begin, there is an incredibly large gap between the rich and poor within the district. The

district residents include over 10,000 students however, only about 1,800 of the

approximately 10,000 students currently attend the public school. The other roughly

9,200 attend private schools, a vast majority of them being Yeshivas. Of the students that

do attend public school, nearly 82% live in poverty. Of this 82%, many are from families

who entered the United States illegally, some who entered the United States to escape

hardships and treacherous conditions in their home countries, families whose parents

work multiple jobs, parents who have no educational background, and students who have

interrupted education. Many of these families reside in homes where they rent out a

bedroom for their entire family and have a shared bathroom, kitchen, and other common

living spaces with other families in the home. Further, many of the adults work multiple

low-paying jobs to afford rent and necessities including toiletries and food. As stated

previously, this district is a Title I-funded school meaning that the district receives

funding from the state. The funds are provided with specific intentions for use and must

be allocated to specific areas. Some of the monies are set aside to assist students

experiencing homelessness and some funds are allotted for an administrative reserve for

grant programs (Title I, part a).

I had the experience of working with students and families from this Title I-

funded district and lower-SES backgrounds in various manners. I started working in the

district 13 years ago as an English teacher before becoming an assistant principal for two

years and then the pupil personnel services (PPS) administrator for what is now my sixth

year. As an English Language Arts (ELA) teacher, I taught five periods daily out of 8

periods, and I did this for five years. I taught general education to seventh and eighth

grade students as well as Academic Intervention Support and two honors courses for one

year. For the following four years, I only taught eighth-grade English Language Arts. I

was responsible for teaching students across many domains. I taught one period of honors

and two inclusion classes. The inclusion classes were comprised of half general education

students and approximately half of the students were special education students with an

IEP. A special education teacher co-taught the class with me. I also taught a period of

Academic Intervention Support. The classes also contained English Language Learners in them. My classes were made up of a diverse student population with varying needs, backgrounds, and SES statuses.

As the assistant principal, a title I held for two years, I had numerous and varied responsibilities. I was responsible for overseeing the English as a New Language (ENL) teachers, ELA and Social Studies Departments. I conducted observations of teachers and ran department meetings for each of these departments. I was also responsible for discipline, communication with families, family engagement, state testing coordination, and Positive Behavior Intervention System (PBIS).

As the PPS supervisor, I oversee special education in various aspects of the district. I conduct observations of special education teachers, sit in on and chair Committee on Special Education (CSE) meetings, interface with families constantly, and ensure that Individualized Education Plans (IEPs) are being followed. I am responsible for occupational therapists, physical therapists, and speech therapists as well. Through the various lenses of each position, together these roles have provided me with a full understanding of the dynamics of the district and its student population.

I am empathic toward the students and families in my district, their personal experiences, their stories, and their current situations. I've had the unique experience of working with students on multiple levels which allows me to view the district through those various lenses and perspectives. This was important for me to consider as I conducted my research as I did not want to allow my experiences to impact the analysis of the data that I collected. It is also worth noting that I am a Caucasian female and I do not have the same lived experiences as these students or their families. I utilized best

practices to avoid biases within my research. Through the use of triangulation,

reflexivity, and use of low inference descriptors, I ensured the validity of my research. As

previously mentioned, triangulation refers to "cross-checking" information and

conclusions through the use of multiple procedures of sources. When the different

procedures or courses are in agreement you have "corroboration" (Johnson, 1997 p. 283).

Reflexivity includes the self-awareness of the researcher regarding predispositions and

biases. Low inference descriptors involve "the use of description phrased very close to

the participants' accounts and researchers' field notes" such as verbatim quotes (p. 283).

CHAPTER 4 FINDINGS

The various data points were analyzed as described in the data analysis section of this paper. Upon analyzing the collected data, several themes emerged around the research question that is the focus of this study. Chapter 4 will address the research question and the data collected in response to the question. Each emergent theme will be explained in detail in writing and via a graphic representation to support a comprehensive understanding of the findings.

Before reviewing the data, it is important to recall that the study specifically looks at students from a Title I-funded school district and from low-SES homes. The district identifies students as being from low-SES homes if they qualify for free and reduced lunch. This information is obtained from the registration packets that parents fill out and from the forms submitted by the district to the families to determine eligibility to receive free and reduced lunch. Parents are first sent a letter (Appendix J) and form (Appendix K) titled "CEP Household Income Eligibility Form" for a child to become eligible for free and reduced lunch in the district. The information parents provide on this form helps the district obtain funding and state grants to enhance student programming. With this information, beyond the student programming, students can benefit from support such as qualifying for discounted SAT and ACT testing fees and extracurricular activities through SCOPE. Parents are asked to sign the "Consent to Release Form" (Appendix L) as well as fill out and sign the "Community Eligibility Provision Form" (CEP) and send it back to the district. The community eligibility form asks for the names of all children residing in the household who attend school. It asks for the school they attend, the grade and teacher they have, if they are a foster child, and if they have an income. They are

expected to disclose if anyone in the household receives either Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF), Food Distribution or Indian Reservations (FDPIR) benefits. The next part of the document requires families to share information about the household gross income. The parents need to list all people living in the household and how much and how often they are paid. They must also share if they receive child support or alimony and pensions or retirement payments. All of this information is then used to determine if a family receives free or reduced lunch. The eligibility for reduced lunch for the past three years can be seen in Appendix M. The form lists household size, annual income, monthly income, twice-per-month income, every two weeks income, and weekly income that would make a family eligible.

Each participant used in this study comes from a family that is of low SES and qualifies for free or reduced lunch. The students were randomly selected from the free and reduced lunch list of 8th graders.

Research Question

What are students' perceptions regarding education's ability to improve their future?

Student Background Information

Background information about each participant's background and family was gathered by reviewing students' registration packets as well as through the interviews. Below, the information about each participant will be shared to gain a better understanding of the students' familial situation and background. Information is limited to what was shared in the registration packets and what was revealed during the interviews.

Participant 1

This student registered for the district in 2014. The participant's father was born in a Spanish speaking in the 1980s. His highest level of education was high school, which he attended in his home country, and it is unclear if he completed high school or not. His family came to the United States in the early 2000s. In 2014, when the registration papers were completed, the father was working as a truck driver, a position he had held for 11 years at the time. The participant's mother was also born in a Spanish-speaking country, a different one than the father, in the winter in the late 1980s. Her highest level of formal education was 9th grade. When the registration packet was completed, her mother had worked as a housekeeper for seven years. In 2014, she has been in the United States for 12 years. The student's home language is Spanish. In 2014, they were living in an apartment. She lives at home with her mom, dad, and sister. The student's registration packet lists her as Latino. When the registration packet was completed, there were bills submitted to the district for proof of residence. When the registration packet was completed, the family filled out the Community Eligibility Provision Form (Appendix K) and the Consent to Release Household Income Eligibility Form (Appendix L). Based on the information that they provided and the Qualified based on the Annual Release Public Announcement document (Appendix M) the family qualified for Free and Reduced Lunch.

Participant 2

This student was enrolled in the district in 2014. She lives in a one-family home with her mom, dad, sister, brother, and a family friend. Her father was born in South America in the winter during the late 1970s; his highest education level is high school. In

2014, he was working his 4th year as a carpet cleaner. He came to the United States in the early 2000s. Her mother was born in Central America in the winter of the early1980s. Her highest level of education is also high school. In 2014, she was working her second year as a babysitter. She arrived in the United States in the early 2000s. Spanish is the primary language spoken in the home. The student shared during her interview that she is unsure of what her parents do for work, and they rarely talk with her about their jobs. During the interview, she mentioned having a seven-month-old brother and a half-brother who lives in California. She did not mention anything about having additional siblings who live with her, which contradicts the information provided in 2014. The student's registration packet lists her as Latino. When the registration packets were completed, bills were submitted to the district for proof of residence. When the registration packet was completed, the family filled out the Community Eligibility Provision Form (Appendix K) and the Consent to Release Household Income Eligibility Form (Appendix L). Based on the information that they provided and the Qualified based on the Annual Release Public Announcement document (Appendix M) the family qualified for Free and Reduced Lunch.

Participant 3

The student was enrolled in the district in 2014. English is the language that is spoken at home. The student is listed as Black/African American. The registration packet indicates that CPS was involved with the family at one point but did not specify why. In 2014, the family was living in a 2-bedroom apartment. There were some indications in the packet that pointed to financial struggles that the family may have been experiencing. The father was born in the United States in the mid 1960s. His occupation was listed as a

runner for the airlines, and his highest level of education was college. In the mid-2000s, he had been in his job for 25 years. The student's mother was born in an island country the West Indies in later winter of the late 1970s. Her highest level of education is high school. She came to the United States in the early 2000s. She was in her first month of working as an aircraft cleaner when the registration packet was completed. The student has a sister born in the late 1990s two brothers, one born in the early 2000s, and one born in the mid 1990s. When the registration packet was completed, the student's family was receiving government assistance for things such as food and housing. During the interview, the student disclosed that his father went to college and his mom did not, which aligns with the information in the registration packet. He also shared that the father does not work anymore, but the mother does. He said the father worked for the airlines. He described his parents as intelligent and said they earned a decent salary. When the registration packet was completed by Participant 3's parents, the family filled out the Community Eligibility Provision Form (Appendix K) and the Consent to Release Household Income Eligibility Form (Appendix L). Based on the information that they provided and the Qualified based on the Annual Release Public Announcement document (Appendix M) the family qualified for Free and Reduced Lunch.

Participant 4

The student's registration packet was completed in 2019. At the time, there were financial struggles indicated in the registration packet. There were also concerns regarding some properties owned by the family. The family had listed themselves as Asian, not Hispanic or Latino. The father worked for a real estate company as his

occupation. When the registration packet was completed, he had been with the company for ten years.

The mother was unemployed when the registration packet was completed; she was listed as a homemaker. The family traveled to Arabian Peninsula for a few years before returning to the United States. The father was born in Brooklyn in the late 1970s. The mother was born in the Arabian Peninsula in the early 1980s. While the family does speak Arabic, the home language is English. The student has four siblings: three sisters and one brother. He has a sister born in the late 1990s who graduated high school and attended college. He has another sister who was born in the mid-2000s, and at the time the registration packet was completed, this sister was enrolled in public school. His third sister was born in the late 1990s. She also graduated high school and attended the same college as her sibling. A brother in the family was born in the early 2000s. He graduated high school and attended a community college. During the interview, when asked about his parents, the student described his dad working with taxes, though he was unsure of his father's exact job title. He said, "My mom is a stay-at-home mom, of course" (Interview of Participant 4), and his dad is the one who "brings home the dough" (Interview of Participant 4). When the registration packet was completed, the family filled out the Community Eligibility Provision Form (Appendix K) and the Consent to Release Household Income Eligibility Form (Appendix L). Based on the information that they provided and the Qualified based on the Annual Release Public Announcement document (Appendix M) the family qualified for Free and Reduced Lunch.

Participant 5

The student was registered with the district in 2019. The registration packet indicated that the family rented a house, but the information suggests that the student's family lived in a multi-family residence in 2014. The student's father was born in Central America in the mid-1980s. His highest level of education was listed as a GED. His occupation at the time was a clerk. In 2014, the father had been in the United States for ten years, and he had been in his current job for eight years. The mother was born in North America in the mid-1980s. Her level of education was unclear. She did not have a job when the registration packet was completed. She was in the United States for 24 years after completing the registration packet. During the student interview, the participant shared that she lives with her two grandmothers, mom, dad, and sister. She said she believed her dad worked with HVACs as a handyman. She said her mom was a nurse and that her mom went to college in the United States. She said her father only received his education in his home country. When Participant 5's parents completed the registration packet, the family filled out the Community Eligibility Provision Form (Appendix K) and the Consent to Release Household Income Eligibility Form (Appendix L). Based on the information that they provided and the Qualified based on the Annual Release Public Announcement document (Appendix M) the family qualified for Free and Reduced Lunch.

Themes Related to Student Background

The themes related to student background underline the complex interplay of SES factors as well as family dynamics and cultural influences. The data and information gathered from the registration packets highlight the varying SES backgrounds that exist

across students. The data provided insight into some financial struggles (e.g., unpaid bills, liens on property, and reliance on public assistance programs). There were clear disparities between parental occupations and the educational attainment of the parents. Parents' level of education ranged from high school to college and their occupations included homemaker, truck driver, carpet cleaner, airport work, and real-estate work. All of these aspects contribute to differences in income levels and financial security for families.

Also noted in the data were the differences in family structure among participants. Some families live in multi-generational households while other families live with extended family members and some families even live with friends at one point. Note as well, is the cultural diversity and different languages among the families. Families of participants originated from various countries including Yemen, Guatemala, Jamaica, Mexico, Peru, and El Salvador. Languages spoken at home include English, Spanish, and Arabic. This information is key to understanding the various aspects that influence a child's values and understanding of education.

Financial Struggles

The theme of financial struggles emerged from the data collected from the registration packets. Participant 1's registration packet contained bills including various bills for utilities as proof of registration. The bills were marked as paid. What is important to notice and acknowledge is that the amount of the bills may suggest that the family was struggling to meet their expenses. With Participant 2, the family had expenses and financial obligations beyond utilities including as demonstrated by other credit card bills. There was a demonstration of financial strain from artifacts present in the

registration packet. Additionally, the family's living situation, sharing a home with a family friend, could indicate a need for additional support or financial pooling to afford housing. Participant 3's registration packet also suggested information about prior financial difficulties. The family's reliance on government assistance further underscores the struggles that the family experienced financially. Despite the father's 25-year employment and the highest level of his education being college, the family was still reliant on government assistance, pointing to potential challenges that the family faced in order to meet their financial obligations.

Similarly to some of his peers, Participant 4's family had significant issues with unpaid bills, including mortgage bills. This points to acute financial stress that the family was experiencing. While Participant 5's registration packet did not contain as much information related to finances and financial struggle, one can wonder if the decision to live with extended family members was made for financial reasons.

These difficulties point to various financial struggles ranging from severe (e.g. unpaid mortgage and government assistance) to less severe (e.g. unpaid phone bill). These financial struggles can certainly significantly impact the lives of students. These struggles can affect the resources the students have available to them as well as the educational opportunities afforded to them. This information can be helpful to educators in order to ensure they are able to provide appropriate support to students to ensure their success despite their financial circumstances.

Disparities in Parental Occupation

Disparities in parental occupation are another theme that emerged from the data collected from the registration packets. Delving deeper into this data we recognize that

the parents of the participants who are employed are engaged in jobs with a wide range of pay and opportunity for advancement or large salary increase. Additionally, it is noted that some of these jobs can be considered more stable than other jobs with less of a chance to be excessed or terminated due to unions, types of jobs, and the specific employer.

Participant 1's registration packet reported that his father was employed as truck driver. A truck driver job is known to involve long hours and sometimes physical labor. Her mother reported that she was a housekeeper, an occupation that is often characterized by low pay and requires the worker to be on their feet and moving about throughout their workday. Neither of these jobs likely offer opportunities for advancement in career or wages that provide significant financial stability. Participant 2's father works as a carpet cleaner which can also be viewed as a physically demanding job. The mother indicated in the registration packet that she was a babysitter, a job that is not known for its job security or high wages. A babysitting job also does not come with benefits which can cause additional financial stress on a family needing to pay for medical insurance without the support and contributions of the employer. Participant 3's father was a runner at the airport, a place where there is potential for job stability, advancement in career, and benefits. He was at this place of employment for 25 years when the registration packet was completed. The mother indicated that she too worked at the airport however, she worked as an aircraft cleaner. This type of job may involve physical demands and may not come with the same opportunities for advancement. Within Participant 3's family, we also note disparities in the level of education completed by the mother and father. The father's highest level of education was college while the mother's highest level of

education was high school. Participant 4's father worked as a real estate agent, a job that has the potential for higher income and more stability. It is important to note that during the interview, the participant reported that the father works with taxes which is not what the registration packet indicated. The mother indicated that she was a homemaker which may mean that she is not involved with employment outside of her home. Participant 5's father worked as a clerk at the time the registration packet was completed. During the interview, the student shared that her father worked with HVAC systems. Accounting for these discrepancies, and important to note, is that some time has passed since the registration packets were completed and jobs may have changed since. At the time the registration packet was completed, Participant 5's mother was not working however, at the interview the student shared that her mother was a nurse in a hospital.

It is evident that disparities exist among the jobs held by the parents of the participants. These disparities can have an impact on and influence things like communication about career aspirations as well as family dynamics and overall SES which can certainly influence a student's perceptions of and experiences related to education, whether positive or negative. One should understand these disparities in the field of education to again ensure that teachers are meeting students where they are; embracing their "funds of knowledge" in order to support them and to address their aspirations; and helping them see their capabilities despite factors that are currently beyond their control.

Educational Attainment

The data unveiled information on participants' parents' level of educational attainment. Educational attainment ranged from limited formal education to higher

academic educational achievements. Both of Participant 1's parents had lower levels of

formal education. The father's highest level of formal education was high school but the

grade of which was completed is uncertain. While this doesn't reflect a deficit in the child

or her abilities, it does potentially impact the ability of the parents to provide educational

support and other educational resources to the student. Participant 2's parents both

achieved high school education as their highest level of formal education. Again, not

pointing to a deficit in the child's abilities, there is concern that the parents may have

limited information and understanding regarding higher education and career pathways to

provide support for their child. It is important to note, that even achieving a college

degree or attending college minus a degree does not automatically result in living a life of

higher economic status. Participant 3's father attended college and the mother's highest

level of education was some grade in high school. Despite the father's college education,

the family's reliance on government assistance highlights the complex socioeconomic

factors and systemic barriers that can impact a family's financial stability. This

emphasizes the point that educational attainment alone does not guarantee a level of

financial stability. It also surfaces the potential that students might be discouraged by

observing a disconnect between education and career success. Specifically, they may see

a parent going to college and struggling financially and believe that education has a poor

return on investment. Participant 4's registration packet did not indicate a level of

educational completion for the father. Again, there was also a discrepancy between the

father's job as listed on the registration packet and what the student shared during the

interview. A job involving taxes would typically require a formal level of higher

education. Participant 5's father listed GED as his highest level of formal education

pointing to a completion of a high school equivalency. The mother's formal education was unclear. As stated previously, while the educational attainment of parents does not reflect a deficit in the levels or abilities of the student, the circumstances create some systemic issues that may produce some obstacles for the child such as having support and assistance academically from their parents or the parents being able to offer guidance with the college process if that is the pathway that they choose.

Participant 3 is clear in his understanding of the role of education and how it impacts his future. He references entrepreneurship throughout his interview as well as his possible interest in becoming a professional athlete. He discusses math and the place it holds in his future career as an entrepreneur. He makes a direct correlation between his future career and his favorite subject stating that math is essential because he will "be mostly doing numbers, you know, calculating and all that type of stuff" (Interview of Participant 3). He also indicates that education will help provide him with a stable future and a high-paying job after he graduates college. He says, "I'll probably have a really good job that pays a lot of money. So I'll be stable, get a house, you know, and do things" (Interview of Participant 3). Interestingly, the student has varying views towards the different subjects that he is required to take in school. He expresses a stronger preference to subjects he feels are relevant to his future such as math and English class. Opposite of this, he does not see social studies or science as impactful to his future outside of school. When questioned about how he views success, he explains that success is multifaceted and includes intelligence, stability, and organization. He sees success beyond just a financial standpoint. "A successful adult to me is someone who is smart, has/is stable...have things going for them, organized" (Interview of Participant 3). He even

acknowledges the limitations imposed by lack of education when he says, "It really is [important for my future] because without education, there's certain things you can't do, you're restricted to a lot of the things…" He is stating that education is a necessity in order to achieve certain things in life. He says that without education, opportunities are shifted or changed.

Participant 4's connection between education and future success was not as defined or clear. While the student indicated a hope to go to college, he was uncertain about his future plans and career path. As will be discussed below, it is possible that his uncertainty is connected to his familial background. He states, "I'm not very sure about that... I'm gonna go to college and then get a job, but I'm not sure what I'm gonna [do] right after high school immediately" (Interview of Participant 4). He also states, "I find it important because I want to earn a degree to help my parents out because my father is getting very old" in regard to education's importance" (Interview of Participant 4).

Participant 5, like many of her peers, discerns that there is a place for education in influencing her future. She links her future success, college admission, and potential job interviews to her current education experience. She proclaims, "I'd say school is very important for me because if I do really good and try hard at school, then it can help me get into a good college and it'll be useful for like job interviews and stuff" (Interview of Participant 5). She understands that performing well in school will pave the way for a bright future for her to achieve her goals and aspirations. While she is not certain of her specific future career, she identifies an interest in character design and even shares her interest in going to a college with a well-regarded art program.

All students demonstrated some level of understanding and connection between school and success in the future. The level of understanding does vary from participant to participant, and it would behoove us to explore how familial background may influence this.

Familial Background and Its Influence

In disaggregating the data, it is evident that familial background is important to acknowledge. Most of the participants' responses can be contextualized within their familial backgrounds to some degree. This suggests that factors related to SES have the potential to systematically influence their perspectives, including those on education. It is important to note as we delve into this data, the information in no way suggests that the students' familial backgrounds are a deficit to them or define them as low achievers. This work spotlights the circumstances that students might be exposed to and how they may impact their understanding of how education might impact their future outcomes. Level of Education and Job Attainment. First, when we look at parental influence, we need to recognize the level of education attained by the parent as well as their job status and role. Both of Participant 1's parents immigrated from Central America and have limited formal education. It is uncertain if the father completed high school and the mother only completed through the 9th grade. The question becomes, how does this impact the participant? It may influence the participant's understanding of why a person may choose to go to college. It may also influence the support that the student receives regarding the college process and navigating that experience. Her father is a truck driver, and her mom is a housekeeper. While both occupations are respectable, neither of them may require higher levels of education. Participant 1 does express a desire to hold a

career such as a police officer or detective, breaking away from the norms that are present within her family. Despite the challenges she may face, she has a sense of determination to go to college and pursue a career beyond the opportunities that are available to her parents. She is demonstrating a desire for upward mobility.

Participant 2's father was a carpet cleaner with his highest level of education being college and her mom was a babysitter, also with the highest level of formal education being high school. Participant 2 also expressed a desire for future success wanting to achieve more than her parents regarding her level of education and her future job. Participant 3's father attended college while the mother was noted to have finished high school as her highest level of formal education. What the information from both participants may share with us is that they may be influenced by their parent's experiences – positive or negative. Participant 3's future goals can be impacted by his parents' lived experiences and outcomes. Participant 3's father was an airliner runner with an established and long career of 25 or more years suggesting a level of employment stability. Participant 3 references the decent salary earned by his father and seems to have a positive perception of his parents' professional successes. There is, however, a discrepancy surrounding the job held by Participant 4's father as the registration packet indicated that he was a real estate agent and the student reported that his father worked with taxes. Nevertheless, we are aware of the financial struggles experienced by the family, and the student's responses are certainly informed by these circumstances. He shares wanting to be a cashier to save money for college and he does demonstrate an awareness of the circumstances surrounding his family's financial situation. Participant 4's siblings attended college and this familial precedent perhaps reinforced the

importance of succeeding in school to attend college if that is what the participant chooses to do. He did indicate having been encouraged by his parents, of whom he says, "I learned to focus... in school... from my parents... If you make a mistake, it's okay, but in the future, if you make a mistake, it might be over for you" (Interview of Participant 4).

Participant 5's father was born in Central America earned a GED and worked as a clerk and/or in HVAC. While he didn't pursue higher education, he did obtain a job that required some level of education and a formal skill set. Her mother was born in North America and immigrated to the United States. While in the US she attended college and became a nurse. The mother pursued higher education and then used her degree to acquire a job. This certainly plays a role in influencing Participant 5's understanding of how education can impact your future outcomes. Both parents obtained jobs aligned to their skill sets with both obtaining jobs commensurate with their highest levels of education. This emphasizes the idea of the importance of practical skills but also the significance of pursuing a future aligned with your interests and passions.

The analysis of this data helps to explain how observing the relationships between varying levels of education and jobs contributes to a student's understanding of education and how it may influence future success. Student responses all reflected a combination of personal interest and ambition, and it seems that familial background also influenced their thinking based on their responses. This emphasizes the interaction between students' goals and dreams and the external factors and circumstances that they were born into that may shape their pathways to the future.

Language and Cultural Background. It is crucial to recognize and understand how language, ethnicity, and SES intersect and shape students' perceptions of education, while acknowledging that these factors contribute to the rich diversity of experiences and perspectives within the classroom. Participant 1 is Latino and from a Spanish-speaking home. This information suggests a linguistic connection to heritage which can influence a student's identity formation or even sense of belonging. We must recognize that English may not be the student's first language, and even if it is, she has access to a second language, which can without a doubt be both an asset and a challenge. Aside from the challenges it may present, it does present opportunities for cultural enrichment, increases diversity, and enhances the classroom setting overall. Participant 2's home language is Spanish, again indicating a strong cultural influence within the home. With her positive attitude toward education and involvement in extracurricular activities, one could say her motivation to excel is a result of, and not despite her language and cultural background. Participant 4's family speaks Arabic; however, English is their primary language at home. The linguistic environment from which the participant is from perhaps influences his perception of the role language plays in school. He communicated his understanding of Spanish being an important subject and shared that is why he is trying his best in that class.

Themes Related to Interview Responses

Numerous themes related to students' understanding of education and its ability to improve their future emerged from the detailed analysis of the transcripts (Appendices E – I) from the interviews conducted with the five participants. Themes revealed through data analysis included education being crucial for graduation and success, education

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being a gateway to college and careers, education helping to develop skills and personality, education preparing students for the future, and influencing social and personal growth. These themes tend to connect to and relate to familial background and influence, as demonstrated through the in-depth analysis of the interviews and the data collected from reviewing the students' registration packets. To better understand the themes that emerged from this data set, it is essential to carefully examine the students' responses to some of the questions asked during the interview.

Interview Questions

What is your Favorite Subject in School?

It was interesting to note that two of the five participants mentioned math as their favorite subject. Two of the five students indicated that social studies is their favorite subject, and one of the participants reported that math and social studies are their favorite subjects. The students are all in eighth grade taking a high school regents level math class, which historically resulted in a large portion of the grade failing math and/or the regents and needing to repeat the course. The course is known to be quite rigorous and challenging. It was surprising to hear students share that math was among their favorite courses. While some of them liked math due to finding it easy, others indicated that they liked it because they felt that the class was important for their futures. The following dialogue is from the interview with Participant 2 regarding her favorite subject in school where she explains that she feels she does well in the subject area.

Researcher: Perfect. And what is your favorite subject in school and why?

Participant 2: My favorite subject is either social studies or math because I like

classes mostly if the teachers are nice and they explain well or if I'm good at the

subject and I'm good at math and social studies and I like both of the teachers.

Researcher: Awesome. Did you like math and social studies before this school

year?

Participant 2: Yeah, I liked them for the same reasons. Yeah.

Here we see the student express that she likes math and social studies because the

teachers are nice and because she is a good student in both classes. Differently,

Participant 3 articulates that math can impact his future:

Interviewer: Perfect. And what is your favorite subject in school and why?

Participant 3: Um my favorite subject is math. I really like it because there's a

certain type of future I want have, you know, you know, pass, you know, middle

school and high school, and down the line and you need to know math.

Interviewer: Okay, what type of future is that?

Participant 3: So I typically want to have a future with like, you know, business

type stuff. Have you ever heard of an entrepreneur? Like someone who takes their

ideas and turns it into a business. That's something I really want to do because me

and my mother have been talking about it and I really want to do because me and

my mother been talking about it and I really wanted to do that but I haven't you

know have fully developed the idea but my mother been talking about it and I

really want to do that but I haven't you know have fully developed the idea of

what I should do to make a business. That's why. And if that doesn't go well, then

I am in football activities and I love football. So it depends if like, you know, if I

put all my effort into it and you know, start to get like serious, like take it serious.

Right now it is like a 50/50 because I want to do business and I want to do football and some other stuff.

Interviewer: Excellent. So you think that you need math. Math is your favorite subject, and you need it because you think it will help you to become an entrepreneur?

Participant 3: Yes, it's essential. Cause I'm gonna be mostly doing numbers, you know, calculating and all that type of stuff.

Both participants 4 and 5 expressed that they enjoy social studies and chose that as the class that they consider to be their favorite. In all, it seems only one student expressed a connection between their most liked subject and their future beyond school.

Subjects and How Students Perceive Them to Impact Their Futures

Social Studies

Interestingly, when asked why each subject (math, science, social studies, and English Language Arts) is essential and how what they are learning may impact their future, students reported that social studies is less directly applicable to their future careers; however, students value for historical knowledge was displayed in their responses. Some responses related to social studies and its impact on students' futures included that social studies teach students what has happened in the past so that history is not repeated. It is essential information like being familiar with the senators and governors. Negatively related to social studies, Participant 4 reported that knowing history is unimportant because when you go on a job interview, the employer will not ask what countries were involved with World War I. Participant 3 shared that social studies

does not impact his life at all. Participant 5 communicated that she was not aware of even three jobs that are based on social studies. She shared that social studies only provides knowledge and understanding of what the world has been through. The data demonstrates that while some participants describe social studies as their favorite class, students lack a connection between the subject matter and how it may play a role in their future outside of school.

Math

When asked how math impacts students' futures, overall, there was an acknowledgment that math is important, especially for practical application. Disaggregating the responses to this question further, Participant 1 was unsure how vital math was. Participant 2 explained their understanding of the importance of math related to purchasing items that require measurements, meaning that math provides you with the knowledge and skills needed to take measurements. Participant 3 described math as essential because his plans for his future will require him to be able to navigate a calculator and to have an understanding of numbers. Participant 4 revealed that he forgot much of what he had been taught in math. He did indicate that math "keeps my brain running every day. It makes sure that I am not just playing games" (Interview of Participant 4) and that he is actively thinking, while Participant 5 blatantly stated that if students perform unsatisfactorily in math class, it won't play an impactful role on their future as there are various jobs that do not relate to nor require math skills.

Science

During each interview, students were also asked to explain how they view science as important and in what ways science would impact their futures. There were varying

opinions on the importance of science related to students' futures, but most participants had a common perception that science was not valuable. Participant 1 was unsure of the significance of the subject of science playing a role in her future. Participant 2 noted a connection between science and tending to a wounded bird. At the same time, Participant 3 believes that science is not necessarily significant concerning his future, and he explained science is only suitable for determining how animals function. He even declared that science "wouldn't matter in the real world" (Interview of Participant 3).

Similarly, participant 4 perceives science as fun but needs to be more salient for his future. Not in common with the other participants, participant 5 identified science as necessary for her future. In addition to taking the math algebra regents course, eighth graders must take the science living environment regents course. Participant 5 acknowledged that this course is a high school level course, and the course is pushing her forward, helping her to establish high school credits. While this is a more immediate impact that science would have on her future, she also noted that perhaps she or some classmates would become scientists or cure cancer. She said that science provides students with more opportunities.

English Language Arts

Responses from students regarding English Language Art (ELA), how it is important, and how it may impact their futures were similar in that participants emphasized ELA as important in developing skills like spelling, grammar, and vocabulary. The more detailed evaluation showed that Participant 1 again needed clarification on the importance of the subject matter. Participants 2, 3, and 4 addressed the role of the ELA course in developing their spelling, grammar, punctuation, and

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writing skills. Participant 5 further explained that ELA provides students with the push to obtain more knowledge on how to read and write. She emphasized the numerous jobs related to ELA class, including but not limited to becoming a publisher or author. Participant 5 understood that ELA class can provide the skills necessary to write speeches and use advanced vocabulary.

Subjects Overall

Students shared various answers related to their favorite subjects and understanding of each subject's purpose and importance later on. From this data and information, a common theme emerged related to students' pragmatic view of education. In their responses, students highlighted different aspects of each subject and recognized the importance of acquiring various specific skills for the future that apply to real-world situations. While students were not able to articulate specifics about particular subjects and their impact on their future, they did relay a general understanding that certain subjects, such as math, teach certain skills that they will need to be successful later on in life. Taken together, it seems that students' perceptions of education tend to be subject-specific. Any potential value of a liberal arts education does not appear to be ingrained in this cohort. They appear to focus on specific subject-related skills and knowledge relevant in their minds to desired future jobs and careers.

How Important is School?

With this question, many themes emerged that are vitally important to gain an enhanced understanding of how students perceive education's ability to impact their future. The previously discussed themes are also present within the responses to this question as well as other interview questions that are discussed below. Participants shared

the belief and understanding that school is a necessary step in achieving their goals and obtaining a diploma, which they consider essential for their futures. They emphasize the importance of graduation for future success. Participant 1 reported that school is important in order to graduate and do well. She stated that school is necessary to complete if there is a desire to go to college in the future. Participant 2 also shared the impression that school is very important in order to have an opportunity to get accepted into a quality college or university and ultimately to have a good career. Similarly, participant 3 felt that school is very important; however, different from his peers, participant 3 expressed that school is important because it provides students with friendships, helps to develop personality, and "shows who you are as a person" (Interview of Participant 3). This demonstrates that students may believe that education can help develop social skills and that it contributes to personal growth. Students generally recognize the school as a place where they can make personal gains and foster social skills that may be pertinent to their futures. This directly connects to students' developing their personalities in the school environment. These skills are crucial to future endeavors and interactions beyond school. Participant 4, aligned with Participants 1 and 2, believes that school is important because it is needed to earn a degree. He also conveyed that school helps to provide his brain with what he described as exercise. Participant 5 remarked that school is essential because succeeding in school will lead to acceptance into a reputable college or university, resulting in a well-regarded career. The participants disclosed that education provides a gateway to college and careers. They believe attending college is crucial for securing a reputable job and success in their careers. Participant 3 articulates the various reasons that school is important to him:

Participant 3: Um School is really important. I say it's a, it's a number one priority because without school like most, most of the things you have in life you wouldn't have without it like friends you know, your personality, how you develop, how you are as a person, like you're just developing throughout school and it really shows who are because you have all these people to talk to all these other other friends, you know, these teachers. You have your grades, you have all this type of work. You have all these set activities to do and just show who you are as a person and really improve and like and see where you want to go.

He demonstrates that all these varied components of why school is important all connect back to education providing a person with a pathway to something more in the future. Participant 4 expands on this idea a bit further by emphasizing the connection between school and a degree that can lead to a career opportunity which will ultimately lead to money. Participant 4 states, "I find it important because I want to like earn a degree to help my parents out because my dad is getting very old. So like the important of school is so that I can like keep my brain like what's the word for it? Like exercise everyday" (Interview of Participant 4).

Overall, students expressed a positive perception of education. The data suggests that students understand that school is valuable and that there are numerous ways in which it may impact their future including the ability to earn money and the ability to acquire a job. There was a connection that school teaches skills that may be needed for the future post-high school.

What is Your 5-Year Plan?

Data analysis suggests that students view school as preparation for the future. Each participant was able to articulate some degree of a 5-year plan post-high school. These plans included higher education, part-time work, and specific career paths, indicating that they realize that school is integral to achieving these goals. Despite facing some of the challenges experienced by families from low-socioeconomic homes, the students have clear and well-defined plans for their future that all use education to build their futures, as described in the above paragraph. Participant 1 described her 5-year plan to include training to become a police officer, while Participant 2 indicated that her 5-year plan involved working part-time while in college. The need to work concurrently to enrollment in school may present a systemic barrier for students from low SES backgrounds. Without the same financial pressure, their higher SES peers may have additional time and resources to focus on educational endeavors including study time and co-curricular activities. Though it is beyond the score of this research the more distal implications of SES should be explored as students progress through high school, higher education, and careers. See the excerpt below from the interview with Participant 2 that demonstrates her five-year plan:

> Participant 2: The first 5 years after graduating high school, I see myself in college studying whatever I decide to study, probably one of those things that I said, maybe all of them. So I don't know how long all of that will take so I'll probably be doing that.
>
> Interviewer: Okay, excellent. Are you going to work while you're in college or you're just gonna [sic] go to college?

Participant 2: I think I might work a part-time job just to make a little extra

income. And yeah.

Participant 2 is referring to going to college to study to become a writer, actress, or director. She acknowledges that she will likely need to work while she is in college to make additional money.

Participant 4, in a similar vein, described his plan as wanting to go to college and get a job, but he was curious if he wanted to do this immediately upon graduating high school. Therefore, he was unclear about his 5-year plan. Participant 3's 5-year plan is to go to college. Participant 5, not much different than her peers, explained that her 5-year plan was to get into college and "take it from there" (Interview of Participant 5). She said she would consider getting a side job to make money while in college. All of these 5-year plans post-high school demonstrate a strong belief in the transformative power of education.

Responses to this question convey that students have clear future plans that are tied to education. The plans they expressed included going to college and working part-time, and most responses also included the desire to obtain a job once finished with college. This demonstrates that students have a strong belief that education holds the power to transform their futures. These aspirations of completing college and obtaining a job in the future suggest that students believe that education is a pathway to improved financial circumstances, and economic mobility and, can lead to improved economic opportunities in the future.

What Do You Think is the Reason for Going to School?

Participants had a variety of reasons and beliefs about why they needed to attend school. Preparation for the future, gaining knowledge, learning life skills, and opportunities for better life experiences were among the reasons ascertained from analyzing the data. Participant 1 revealed her beliefs about why she attends school: That school can help foster and build relationships. It also allows you to learn skills critical to being successful. She explained that people go to school, "To help with your education like, like certain things can help you later on in life. Like if you want to learn something like a certain subject, maybe can help you with that" (Interview of Participant 1). When asked to expand on her response and explain what she meant by 'later on in life' she elaborated with later on meaning a career.

Participant 2 said that students go to school to gain knowledge of the world so that they can help the world. This was interpreted to mean that students go to school to gain knowledge and learn skills needed to be active participants in society and make a positive mark on the world. At first Participant 3 was stumped by this question and he was very unsure how to respond immediately. After processing the question, Participant 3 reasoned that school was a starting point or a stepping-stone to the future. He said, "Honestly, just like it's a starting point. I'm not sure how to explain it, but I could like, it's a starting point for you in life for you to just develop. Develop. Yeah, honestly, I kept saying that over and over, but it's really just a starting point, but to see where would you go off from this point and after" (Interview of Participant 3). Participant 4 perceives the reason for attending school differently than his peers. He explained that while school prepares for the future, it minimally does so. He believes that most of the skills that will

be helpful in the future are acquired from your parents. He said that your parents are the ones who teach you to be focused, not to fail, and not to succumb to pressure. When asked what the reason is for attending school he responded, "I think the reason is so that it could prepare you a little bit for the future. But most of it, most of the things that you need to learn for the future, you will learn like during life or from your parents" (Interview of Participant 4).

Participant 5 recognizes the ability of education to help obtain a better future. She said that education gives students the push that people coming into America don't usually/normally get, as education varies from country to country. Directly stated, Participant 5 said the reason for going to school is "To help us get a better life. To give us a push that like people coming into America don't usually, don't normally always get like education" (Interview of Participant 5). The value placed on education differs, as does the execution and delivery of education and instruction. Being from a family that immigrated to America and whose parents did not receive a formal education in the manner we delineate in the United States, she seems to understand how valuable education is to her future as a member of society in this country.

What Makes Successful People Successful?

The data provides insights into what the participants believe creates success. The data suggests that students perceive successful people as hardworking, dedicated, organized, smart, and able to think outside the box. They also believe successful people possess ingenuity and stability. Successful people, in their minds, have nice things, financial success/reputable jobs, and positive mindsets. Participant 1 relayed that she was unsure of the words to use to answer this question initially. Upon rewording the question,

she said that what a person does in life demonstrates success. Participant 3 conveyed that successful people are successful when they dedicate themselves to completing something and when they keep working hard. In these cases, success is seen as the result of putting forth effort, being committed to a task, and having a strong work ethic. Participant 2 said that successful people are hardworking and organized. Participant 2 shared that "What makes a successful person successful is being like hardworking and like focusing on what you need to do. Having kind of an organized state" (Interview of Participant 2). Being organized in one's approach to completing a task is seen as a contributing factor to success, as Participant 2 perceives it. Participant 3 also conveyed that people are successful when they have the mindset to do something specific. He also states that successful people are smart. He values an optimistic, positive outlook and attitude and attributes success to these qualities.

> Participant 3: Honestly, what makes the people successful is really just having dedication to do something. No, dedication to just, you know, keep going, keep working, keep doing what they wanna [sic] do. And they they have this type of mindset that they want they wanna [sic] do this specific thing they wanna [sic] get somewhere like they don't wanna [sic] be like anybody else, they just want wanna [sic] relax sit down knowing they did a bunch of like not being a failure or whatever else you could. Well, whatever words they could be.
>
> Interviewer: Okay, so what does a successful adult look like to you?
>
> Participant 3: A successful adult. I would say successful adults to me is someone who is smart, has is stable, you know, had everything, everything organized, nice had things. You know, have things going for them, organized, to me. Like if you're

if you're just staying at home not doing nothing you're playing on your phone,

you're not doing much at home, you're not going outside, you're not interacting

with people. You have no money. I mean the money part doesn't really matter as

much. I know it's still, you know, you know, get you around, but it's really how

how you know, you know, other things are doing for you in life.

Participant 4 explained that successful people are hardworking people who do not just lie

around all day. He said that successful people make an effort to spend time with their

loved ones. He also attributes success to having a reputable job, such as that of an

accountant. Participant 5 shared that successful people have integrity and courage. They

have stamina and the will to keep going. Successful people are clever, have ingenuity,

and have the ability to think outside of the box.

What is the Most Rewarding Part of School?

The data suggests a multifaceted nature of what students find to be the most

fulfilling in their educational journey. Their responses vary in nature, but ultimately, all

relate to what they find rewarding about school. Participant 1 identified the most

rewarding parts of the school, which included meeting new people, interacting with

people, and knowing that school would be helpful later on. Similarly, participant 2

acknowledged that one of the most rewarding aspects of school for her is having the

opportunity to spend time with her friends. Further, she stated that she finds learning new

information to be rewarding, "The most rewarding part about attending school is getting

to learn new things and getting to hang out with friends and stuff. And I think that is

really fun" (Interview of Participant 2).

Participant 3 also recognized that a rewarding component of the school is interacting with his peers. He also indicated that school positively occupies students in that they are busy thinking and not just sitting at home. Participant 4 expressed pride in earning high grades, identifying this as a rewarding part of school. He also shared that not having his parents angry with him for missing his bus is rewarding to him. Lastly, Participant 5 explained that school is rewarding because if you show up daily, you can earn student of the month and even get placed in honors courses. To her, the ability to excel and achieve is rewarding. This data shows that students share a common value in the social aspect of school. Building new relationships and interacting with their peers is something that several participants deemed a rewarding component of school.

In analyzing their responses, it is also apparent that students find school rewarding because it contributes to their personal development and growth. With growth comes success, and students find the feeling of accomplishment and being proud of their achievements to be a rewarding part of school.

Aspects of School You Like and Aspects of School You Dislike

Surprisingly, when asked about aspects of school that students did not like, many students responded that there was nothing that they didn't like about school. Participant 2 shared that she liked everything about school, and Participant 3 said there was nothing about school that he didn't like, although he conveyed that he finds school to be boring. Participant 4 emphasized his disdain for homework when he was asked to respond to what aspects of school he didn't like. He expressed that he wants time to himself when he arrives home after school rather than continuing to do schoolwork. He specifically stated that he does not like to complete homework assigned in Spanish class as it is not an area

of strength for him. When asked to describe aspects of school she didn't like, Participant 5 reported feeling that there are inappropriate punishments for students who commit transgressions. She feels that the consequences, if any, that they receive are neither appropriate nor fairly assigned. She feels students should be held more accountable for their actions. This was the only area of school that she disliked and that she felt strongly about.

Responses to the question "What aspects of school do you like?" were similar to responses to the question about what students found to be most rewarding about school. Participant 1 revealed that the aspect of school that she liked the most was the opportunity to hang out with her friends, while Participant 2 stated that extracurricular activities were the component of school that she liked the most. She said joining clubs and sports provides additional time to hang out with friends. She explained, "The aspects of school I like is the like the extracurriculars and stuff because I like joining sports, clubs, and I also get extra time to hang out with my friends…" (Interview of Participant 2). Participant 3 shared various aspects of school that he likes, including classes such as math and ELA. He explained that ELA teaches students important skills like grammar and reading. He also said he likes that school offers students experiences with sports and other activities that they may not otherwise have exposure to. Below is Participant 3's response to this question:

> Participant 3: Aspects of school, definitely a bunch of the classes, but the most the main aspect of school is probably, probably the um, what is it? It's the sports activities, yeah, sports activities. The sports activities, I, I love that aspect only because I, you know, I get to play a sport after school. I get to do something I

really want to do after school and it shows like what what I want in the future

school and it shows like what I what I want in the future. I just want I want to you

know play something you know do an activity with my friends and mostly it's not

even the reason that I joined just to be with my friends it's real it's something I'm

passionate about something I just really want to do and see where I go if I actually

take it serious.

Participant 4 iterated that recess is an aspect of school that he likes. He enjoys and

appreciates the socialization. In that same vein, he also likes that school allows students

to join after-school clubs where they can spend time with peers. Participant 5's response

is very much aligned with those of his peers in that she also likes the socialization aspect

of school, specifically referencing after-school clubs such as drama, dance, music, and

sports as her favorite aspects of school.

Relationship with Peers

When asked to describe their relationships with their peers, each participant's

answers varied slightly and idiosyncratic. Participant 1 said that she is in class with some

of her friends. She talks to them during recess about schoolwork. She said she is mindful

to try not to leave anyone out of social interactions. Participant 2 said she is in class with

some of her friends as well. She described her relationship with her peers as good. She

said she wants to run for student government, so she feels that developing good

relationships with her peers will help her achieve this goal. Participant 4 also described

his relationship with his friends as being good. He said he plays and talks with his friends

during lunch and recess. Some of his friends are in class with him, and others are not.

Participant 5 said she has friends, but she does not really talk to them unless it is to ask

them the time or to ask them a question about the homework. As mentioned above, many students find the most rewarding aspect of school to be the opportunity for social interactions and the ability to build relationships. The ability to have these interactions with their peers and friends contributes to their positive school experience.

Relationship with Teachers

While it is not explicitly stated within their responses, students' answers to the question regarding their relationships with their teachers lead one to believe that teachers play a role in students' positive experiences in school, thus impacting their perception of education's ability to impact their future. Participant 1 shared, regarding her relationship with her teachers, that in some classes, she raises her hand, and in others, she does not. She volunteers to respond to questions but stays quiet most of the time in class. She also shared that she used to be scared to show up to class and would frequently skip class last year. She said she no longer does that because she understands the importance of showing up and being present. Participant 2 said she had developed a good rapport with her teachers. She raises her hand in class, does her work, and feels that her teachers like and respect her because she completes the tasks assigned to and expected of her. She shared that her teachers all support her student government participation and interest in running for an elected position. Participant 4 said he has established a relationship with some of her teachers, but with others, he feels he has not developed any rapport. He explained that he remains quiet in some of his classes and doesn't speak much. He also described some of his teachers as being very energetic. Lastly, Participant 5 reported that she is nice to her teachers, and they are nice to her. She even said that she finds a few of her teachers annoying, but "there is no bad blood or anything" (Participant 5 Interview).

Graduation, Success, Future Goals, and Familial Background

It is important to recognize the many themes that emerged through the interviews related to the importance of education for graduation and success. The responses underscore the multifaceted nature of the relationship that exists between familial influences, aspirations for future success, and personal growth. I will delve deeper into this by breaking down some of the themes that emerged through this lens.

Education as a Pathway

Participant 1 articulates a clear desire to graduate high school and attend college. She sees education as a pathway to achieving her goals and aspirations. She explains that she desires to have a family and pursue a career related to law enforcement. She says, "It's important because I wanna like, I wanna graduate, I wanna like, you know do well and just go to college and stuff" (Interview of Participant 1). She even acknowledges a shift in her value of and understanding of education in the change she made regarding her behavior as it was getting in the way of her being successful in school. "Cause last year I was like, I don't know, last year I got in trouble too much, like, I got into fights or arguments, and I didn't really like that" (Interview of Participant 1). This statement signifies the positive shift in her attitude and behavior indicating a desire to improve and succeed in the future. While Participant 1 may not have articulated a clear understanding of the connection between specific subjects and her future, she did identify the broader impact that education has on future careers and career readiness when she stated "Like certain things can help you later on in life. Like if you want to learn to like learn something like a certain subject maybe can help you with that…your job, your career and stuff" (Interview of Participant 1).

Participant 2 also demonstrates an understanding of the significance of education for future opportunities and success. She establishes that hard work and dedication will help to lead to a future of success. Participant 2 stresses the idea that education provides a pathway to obtaining her future goals. She indicates her desire to attend college and pursue a career in acting, directing, or writing. During the interview, she states that, "School is very important for me so I can get into a good college and get into a good career" and "I envision myself as an actress and writer or a director…I also want to run for President" (Interview of Participant 2). She understands that in order to be successful you need to apply yourself and work hard "What makes a successful person successful is being hardworking and focusing on what you need to do" and she even makes connections between subjects and their impact on her future:

> e.g., 1 - I think learning English is important because you have to know how to write stuff like correctly, correct grammar, like for job applications, for college, like you just need it.

> e.g., 2 - In science, we're learning about all different kinds of things... I think that's important because maybe like one day I'm outside and then I see like a bird or something and it's wounded maybe I could help it because of what I'm learning.

She values and views education as crucial for achieving her dreams in the future. She relays that effort and dedication are necessary to achieve academic success. Her attitudes and beliefs reflect a strong comprehension of education's importance regarding her ability to graduate and succeed in the future.

Student Observations and Artifacts

As part of the data collection process, I observed each student for 47 minutes in either math or ELA class. Each observation was unannounced meaning that while the student was informed that I would be observing them in class, they were unaware of the date, time, or class that I would be conducting the observation. The teacher was aware that I was coming in on a specific day and time to observe.

Participant 1 Observation

I conducted an observation of Participant 1 in her math class on December 13, 2023. This class was a general education setting with one general education teacher in the classroom and approximately 27 students including the participant. The student was observed sitting in the second to last seat in the back of the classroom. During the period, the student was called upon to answer a question and she answered the question incorrectly. She was observed copying notes from the board. She raised her hand when questions were asked of the class, and she answered questions even when not volunteering to respond. There was one instance where the participant raised her hand to share the formula for an algebraic equation. It was noted that the student worked diligently and stayed focused for the entirety of the 47-minute class period. She was seen as an active participant in the classroom, and she was eager to answer questions.

Participant 1 Teacher Provided Artifacts

The teacher provided artifacts/samples of class work and recent tests that the student completed. The student scored a 31 out of 40 on the examination resulting in a 78% on the assessment. This assessment was titled "Building Blocks" as the evaluation assessed students understanding of basic building blocks/topics in algebra which are the

building blocks to the rest of the year-long course. The student attempted to solve all questions on the test. On some questions, she earned full credit while on others she earned partial credit or no credit at all. On a subsequent test titled "Polynomials", the student earned a 10 out of 50, resulting in a 20%. On this assessment, the student received no credit for many of her responses but again, all questions were attempted and the student showered work for each question as required and stated in the directions. On the third assessment which assessed students' understanding of equations, the student earned a 17 out of 50 which is equivalent to a 34%. On the fourth test titled "Word Problems" the student earned a 26/50, equaling 52% out of 100. On a quiz assessing students' understanding of coordinates planes and slope, the student's overall score was 60% or 15/25. The homework that was provided demonstrated effort in that the student attempted all the problems.

Participant 2 Observation

Participant 2 was observed during ELA class which is her last class of the day. The student is an honors ELA class consisting of about 18 students. The student was sitting in the front of the class at a desk closest to the teacher's desk. Students were all sitting in dyads. The student was engaged with her work and focused on the material in front of her. She was seen working on her computer as directed by the teacher. At the beginning of the lesson, it was noted that the student presented with a lack of proficiency in her typing. What initially seemed to be a lack of typing skills was thought to have caused her to move at a slower pace about completing her work. She was seen stretching and combing her hair with her fingers frequently throughout the lesson. She was also rocking and shaking her chair. The student was observed repeatedly going from one tab

on her computer to another tab. At one point, she raised her hand to ask the teacher a question, but the volume of the question was inaudible. The teacher responded by asking her if she had a quote to support her writing. The teacher was in close proximity to the student and also struggled to hear her response. The teacher instructed the student to explain what sparked her thought and to use the thought as commentary. Later in the lesson, it was noted that the student was typing at a much quicker pace. Throughout the period, she maintained focus and continued to complete her work. She never presented as distracted while completing her assignment.

Participant 2 Teacher Provided Artifacts

The teacher provided a work sample from the lesson observed. The student completed and submitted one paragraph consisting of 8 sentences. She included two sources in her paragraph. Her paragraph followed the outline provided by the teacher regarding the assignment. The student's paragraph was on the difference between an effective or ordered society and an ethical or morality-based society.

Participant 3 Observation

I conducted an observation of Participant 3 in his general education mathematics class. Upon entering the classroom, the teacher requested that all students hold up their calculators to demonstrate that the calculators were with them in class. The participant held his calculator up. The teacher then went around to check homework which the student informed the teacher he did not complete. As they reviewed the Do Now was being reviewed, the student raised his hand, but the teacher did not call on him, so he put his hand down. When asked to turn to page ten in his workbook, the student complied immediately. The student seemed focused but bored throughout the period.

At one point, the student raised his hand again, this time to read aloud a math

problem. He read with no errors "given two points on a line with coordinates A (0,1) and

B (4,5), determine the equation of the line passing through the two points" with no errors.

He was observed copying notes from the bored and still seemed tired and slightly

disengaged. The teacher was witnessed asking the student if he was okay. He answered

that he was fine and then he followed up with a question regarding the material. The

teacher answered and then the student continued to complete his work. The next problem

the student raised his hand for, he did get incorrect. The teacher explained the incorrect

answer and helped the student and the class arrive at the correct response.

Participant 3 Teacher Provided Artifacts

The teacher provided artifacts/samples of class work and recent tests that the

student completed. The student earned a 23 out of 40 which translates to a 58% out of

100% on a unit test that was titled "Building Blocks". The student earned full credit for

some questions, partial credit for some, and zero credit for others. On unit test number 2

titled "Polynomials," the student earned a 24/50 translating to 58% out of 100%. Again,

the student earned full credit on some problems, partial credit on some, and zero credit on

others. The student attempted all problems on both tests and showed work where

required. On a unit 2 quiz on polynomials, he earned a 16/20 or 80% out of 100%. On

unit test 3 titled "Equations", the student earned a 27 out of 50 translating to 54% out of

100%. Again, as on the previous two tests explained above, he earned credit for some

problems, sometimes full credit, and other times partial credit. Some problems he didn't

earn any credit for completing. He did show his work for all problems and all problems

were attempted. On unit test 4 titled "Equations – Word Problems," the participant earned 56% out of 100% or 28/50.

Participant 4 Observation

Participant 4 was observed in a consultant teacher algebra course. A consultant teacher class means that there are two teachers in the classroom, one special education teacher and one general education teacher. There are some special education students in the class however, the participant is not one of them. The student was observed engaging with the material at the beginning of the lesson. About nine minutes into the lesson, the student asked to go to the bathroom. The teacher told him that he could go in a few minutes. As the homework was being reviewed, the student seemed less engaged than he was at the very start of the period. He seemed to have lost focus and interest in the material. The homework review took over ten minutes to complete. After reviewing the homework, the teacher told the student he could use the bathroom. The student exited the room at 9:48 a.m.

The special education teacher, who does not directly service the student, was observed filling in the student's work while he was out of the classroom to prevent him from missing material when he returned. At 9:56 a.m., the student had not returned from the bathroom. At 9:58 a.m., he finally came back, and the teacher asked if the student was okay. The student indicated that he was fine, and he immediately sat in his seat and began copying notes from the board. The student was then seen fidgeting with his pencil. He was called on at 10:01 a.m. to answer a question. He did not respond with the correct answer and the teacher directed his attention to the numbers in the problem to help him arrive at the correct response. The student then corrected his work and was able to

correctly respond to the question. The student used his calculator to help him solve a problem. He was following along and filling in answers as they continued as a class to work through a variety of math problems. The student was asked what the letter of the slope was, and he answered m, however, his tone and response made it seem as though he was unsure of his answer even though he had the correct response. At 10:10 a.m., the student got up to sharpen his pencil. The teacher asked him to get out another pencil instead of sharpening his pencil during class and distracting others. The teacher asked the students to show ½ of two with their fingers and the student did not comply initially. The teacher asked again for all students to show ½ of 2 with their fingers, she looked directly at him, and then he complied. He answered another question wrong, so the teacher helped him to correct his work while they were circulating the room. He was sitting on the far right in the first row and the fifth seat.

Participant 4 Teacher Provided Artifacts

The teacher provided artifacts/samples of class work and recent tests that the student completed. The student earned a 20/40 translating to 50% on the first unit test titled "Building Blocks". The student attempted all problems and earned full or partial credit or full credit on all problems except one problem which he earned zero credit. On quiz number two for unit five titled "Equation of a Line," he earned 8 out of 20 resulting in a 40% out of 100%. On this quiz, which had a total of nine questions, he only earned full credit for one problem; he earned partial credit for the remaining problems. On a unit test titled "Polynomials," the student earned 19 out of 50 or 38% out of 100%. He answered all problems, but he did not show work for all problems. He earned full credit, partial credit, and no credit for the problems. On another unit test titled "Equations –

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Word Problems" he earned 36% or 18 out of 50. On quiz unit 5 titled "Coordinate Plane and Slope" the student an 18 out of 25 or 72% out of 100%. On the top of a paper attached to unit test 5 which contained little to no work on it, it said that the student claimed that he did most of the work in his head.

Participant 5 Observation

Participant 5 was observed in a consultant teacher algebra class described above. She was focused and engaged throughout the entirety of the lesson. She was observed using her calculator to check answers and solve questions. The student was seen using her calculator to check answers and solve mathematical problems. She actively checked her homework and corrected answers as necessary. She was called on at 9:52 a.m. to state what m and b equal (m – ½ and b = 3). She answered timidly but answered the question correctly. Students were asked to raise their hands if they agreed or not and the student did not comply with raising her yes, no, or I am not sure. The teacher asked students to show with their fingers ½ of 4 and the student did not respond to the question. She asked what letter the y-intercept was, and she answered confidently that the y-intercepts and b were. The student eventually went ahead and tried to solve the next few problems independently. She was seen using her calculator to assist her in completing the problems. When they were reviewing the problems aloud as a class, the teacher asked the students to demonstrate ½ of 2 with their fingers and the participant held up one finger. She was seated in the second seat in the fourth row.

Participant 5 Teacher Provided Artifacts

The teacher provided artifacts/samples of class work and recent tests that the student completed. The student earned a 33 out of 40 or an 83% out of 100% on the first

unit test titled Building Blocks. The student attempted all problems and earned partial or full credit on all problems. On unit test number 2 titled "Polynomials", she earned a 32 out of 50 or 64% out of 100%. She earned full or partial credit on all problems except one problem where she earned zero credit. On another unit test titled "Equations" she received a 40 out of 50 or 80% out of 100%. On top of this test, it was noted that the student received an extra five minutes to complete her test. She earned partial or full credit on all problems on this test. On unit 4 titled "Equations – Word Problems," the student earned a 45 out of 50 or a 90% out of 100%. She earned full or partial credit for all problems on this test. On a quiz for unit 5 titled "Coordinate Plane & Slope," the student received a 24 out of 25 or 92% out of 100%. On another quiz for unit 5, the student earned an 18 out of 20 or 90% out of 100%. The student utilized scrap paper for this particular quiz to work out the answers to problems that she didn't have enough room to work out on the actual test paper.

What do the Observations Tell Us?

The researcher recognizes that the observations contribute, only to a degree, to the overall research study. The observations were only conducted in one 47-minute period per student and therefore can be viewed as only a snapshot of the participant's functioning within the classroom. That being said, there are some components of the observations to consider when looking at the data in totality. Concerning student engagement and focus, students' level of engagement varied across students. Some students worked diligently and maintained focus throughout the lesson. They were seen actively participating and completing assigned work while others demonstrated signs of boredom, disengagement, and distraction. It is important to reflect on student

participation as well which included students raising their hands to respond to questions, volunteering answers, and students responding when not volunteering answers. Engaging with the classwork can also be viewed as a level of participation. Most students had some level of interaction between them and the teacher including the student seeking clarification on material and assignments, receiving support with problems, and students responding to the teacher's instruction.

Observation, Artifacts, and Connections to Themes

Participant 1 can be described as an active participant in the classroom. She was seen raising her hand, answering questions, and volunteering answers. This aligns with her interview responses in that she reported a positive attitude toward her math class and expressed that she is able to succeed in this class. It is crucial to note that there is a discrepancy here in that she is an active participant in the classroom however, the grades do not demonstrate the effort that she puts forth. This suggests that there may be a disconnect between her understanding of the material and her ability at this point in time. One must wonder what contributes to these discrepancies. These discrepancies can be a result of a plethora of reasons including but not limited to test-taking skills, test anxiety, understanding of maternal, and external factors. I noted that while in class, she worked diligently and was focused for the entire class period. She was engaged with the lesson which reflects her commitment to wanting to be successful as she shared during the interview. The artifacts also demonstrated student effort however, again her grades raise the question as to her comprehension of the material. Her test scores, particularly on assessments like "Polynomials" and "Equations," indicate a struggle to apply her understanding to formal assessments.

Participant 2 was also engaged throughout the classroom observation. She was observed focusing on the material even though it seemed she may have struggled with her typing skills. This aligns with her responses during her interview pointing to her desire to dedicate herself to pursuing her goals. While she did experience small distractions such as combing her hair, rocking back and forth, and stretching, she always maintained her attention on the task. Her willingness to interact with the teacher and ask questions demonstrates her interest in being successful and completing the work properly, not just completing it to get it done. The teacher directed the student to incorporate quotes within her writing as she was trying to foster her critical thinking skills. The student's compliance shows her desire to work hard and complete her work to her fullest potential. Aside from her initial struggle with typing which can pose questions about her skills, there were no evident discrepancies in Participant 2's artifacts, observation, and interview.

Participant 3's participation in the classroom demonstrated varying levels of engagement. While he complied with the teacher's instructions, he did admit to not completing homework which signifies a level of disengagement and a lack of preparation for the class. He did raise his hand throughout the class, showing a level of engagement and willingness to participate, however, his responses were incorrect, potentially showing a lack of understanding of the material. During the lesson, the teacher did make an effort to check in on the student and provide necessary support, at one point the teacher even asked the student if he was okay. When the student did respond with the incorrect answer, the teacher provided an explanation of the correct answer helping to facilitate learning and comprehension of the material. The student's scores on his tests and quizzes

varied. He attempted all problems and displayed his work however his scores ranged from 54% which is a failing grade to 80% which is a passing score. Despite his effort to show work and complete assignments, there were some major inconsistencies with his mastery of the subject. While the student's efforts in the class aligned with his desires for this future, the inconsistent performance in math suggests concerns and challenges about turning his goals into a successful reality. The care presented by the teacher toward the student speaks to the teacher-student relationship and its important role within the classroom.

Participant 4 presented as focused, engaged, and attentive during the lesson however, his academic performance as demonstrated by his test and quiz grades does not reflect his engagement in the classroom. His academic performance, as indicated by scores of 38% which is failing, and 72% which is low passing, suggests a lack of mastery of the material. There is a clear disconnect between his level of engagement in class and his understanding of the material. The student presented as compliant as displayed by his willingness to wait for the restroom when he asked to leave the room. There is a discrepancy in the student's perceived understanding of the material and his ability to display accurate work. On one of his artifacts a comment was written "in his head" meaning he completed the work in his head however, the answer was incorrect.

Participant 5 was consistently engaged throughout the lesson. She was focused and actively participated throughout the lesson. She used her calculator to solve problems and check her answers. While she can be described as timid throughout the lesson when responding to questions, she did answer questions correctly and was willing to engage with the work. She was seen not complying when asked to raise her hand to indicate

agreement with an answer. She was a bit hesitant in responding to questions despite

having the right answers. The teacher did provide the student with additional time to

complete an assignment as shown on one of the artifacts. The teacher was trying to

accommodate the student's needs to ensure her success. Her engagement aligns with her

value of education as expressed throughout her interview. Her interactions with her peers

and teacher, timid and confident, can be factors that are influenced by her background.

Overall, the discrepancies and contradictions present are multifaceted in that they address

academic achievement but also consider the various factors that influence behavior and

performance.

How Does This Relate to SES?

Research demonstrates that students from low-SES homes face factors outside of

the class that impact their presentation in the classroom. Lack of outside resources such

as tutoring, and enrichment activities could contribute to lower levels of student

engagement compared to higher-SES peers (Burney & Beilke, 2008; Wagner et al.,

2014). This statement addresses the availability of these resources to students from

lower-SES homes, not their actual ability to maintain engagement within these programs

and activities. Systemic inequities in terms of access to resources and the distribution of

resources negatively impact the academic performance of low-SES students (Burney &

Beilke, 2008). This is not to suggest that low SES students are any less capable of

academic success than their higher SES peers, and, in fact, the inequitable distribution of

educational resources negatively impacts students overall, regardless of SES status.

When analyzing the data from the observations, it is important to consider these

complex relationships and in particular the teacher-student interactions that occur.

Students may also have limited access and exposure to resources outside of school, such as technology, which can impact their ability to complete assignments due to a lack of interaction with the material and resources outside school. Technology offers many opportunities for students to gain knowledge, access resources, and complete assignments. Lack of access to technology can certainly be a disadvantage to any student who doesn't have reliable accessibility.

Interactions with teachers may be influenced by SES. Research suggests that teachers may hold different expectations for students from different SES backgrounds. This can then result in the amount of support and attention that is given to the student by the teacher thus impacting their academic achievement in the class. Roorda et al., (2011) found that students from low-SES families were less likely to describe their relationship with their teachers as being a positive one compared to their peers from higher-SES homes.

The classroom dynamics observed, and the teacher-student interactions described may play an influence in students' SES backgrounds. Discussing this further, we look at the intricacies of the observations and interactions to see what those influences may be, if any. Teachers' beliefs and expectations of students' abilities often vary from student to student as teachers' perceptions are frequently influenced unintentionally by students' various SES backgrounds. Educators may even hold stereotypes about students from varied SES backgrounds, making judgments about their capabilities and linguistic skills (Durante & Fiske, 2017; Gorski, 2012). As in many situations, stereotypes influence interactions among people, and teacher-student interactions are no exception. Given this, we need to consider how teachers may be providing differently for students from lower-

SES homes. We need to recognize these differences and shift the approach to working with students from various backgrounds, recognizing their funds of knowledge and how we can capitalize on their diverse skill sets. Without this mindset, we may be perpetuating opportunity gaps within the classroom. While in some of the observations conducted, students were engaged and did volunteer answers, in other instances, students may not have volunteered to answer questions or hesitated to participate. While I can't say with certainty, it can be questioned if the hesitancy was due to student's awareness of teachers' perceptions towards them or their feeling of being less capable. This concept aligns with the research discussed in chapter two that addresses students' awareness of stereotypes held by teachers and how a student may internalize these viewpoints impacting their achievement (Silverman et al., 2021; Sorhagen, 2013).

As the Pupil Personnel Supervisor in my district, the person who oversees special education, I always look for differentiated instruction within the classroom. In thinking about this, I reflect on the observations of the students conducted for this research. I noted that there was limited, if any, differentiated instruction that occurred. This is important, as the students in the classroom, including the five participants, all have diverse needs and abilities. Given what we know about students from varied SES backgrounds, it is clear that students come to school with a wide range of experiences, skills, challenges, and strengths, many of which are shaped by the systemic factors they face and their SES backgrounds. Teachers should be employing differentiated instruction and strategies to meet the student's individual learning needs (Tomlinson, 2017). This may look like additional support, varied and tiered resources, adapting new teaching

methods and strategies, and including opportunities for student choice and voice throughout their learning experience.

Summary of Findings

This chapter presented findings that developed from the data of this research study. The findings resulted in themes that emerged from the data analysis that was conducted. The data was collected through the use of interviews, observations, reviewing registration packets of participants, and a collection of artifacts that were analyzed. The results were organized in this chapter based on themes that materialized through participant interviews. The data divulged how the participants perceive education's capacity to impact their future and the similarities and differences that exist within their perceptions. While connections were made between education and its importance related to students' futures, the data did not point to students' having a comprehensive understanding of the impact of the information they are learning and its influence on the future. They demonstrated an understanding of the need to obtain specific skills from their classes, their responses were general, and they were unable to articulate what those specific skills were and what they needed them for other than being able to complete a job that would result in most cases with a monetary outcome.

CHAPTER 5 DISCUSSION

This transcendental phenomenological study investigated the perceptions held by students from lower-SES homes regarding education's ability to impact their future. To review, as described in Chapter 2, transcendental phenomenology necessitates the researcher to relinquish any preconceived notions that they may hold about the research topic. The rationale behind employing the transcendental phenomenological approach in this research study lies within the objective of the study which is to acknowledge and understand students' experiences related to SES and their perceptions of education's ability to shape their future.

I noted in a previous chapter that I am a Caucasian female who has not had the same lived experiences as the students within the district where I currently work and from which the participants were selected. I have worked in the district for 13 years in multiple roles; teacher, assistant principal, and pupil personnel supervisor. Each of these roles has allowed me to gain a better understanding of the dynamics of this unique school district as well as the varying needs of many of the families with which we serve. While conducting this research, I set aside any preconceived notions, as explained above, to collect data with limited bias impacting my research. This research is important to me as the information obtained can help to serve the students in this district and in various other districts where students are from low-SES homes. This information can help to shape education, best practices, and courses to ensure students obtain skills and information that will help to improve both their perceptions of education and their futures after high school.

This research study resulted in findings that are reviewed in this chapter. The results demonstrated answers to the research question: What are students' perceptions of education's ability to impact their future? The outcomes that emerged are explained through various themes that manifested from the data analysis including the importance of education for graduation and success, education as a stepping-stone to college and career readiness, education helping to develop skills and personality, student-teacher relationships, and education's influence on social and personal growth. Within these themes, sub-themes and commonalities emerge that interconnect across themes and relate to the literature as seen below.

When reviewing the data, it becomes evident that participants articulate career aspirations and goals such as attending college or pursuing a career. For example, Participant 1 reports a likeness to her math course stating, "My favorite subject is math because I find it really easy" (Interview of Participant 1). Regardless of finding the work easy, she recognizes the importance of attending school as she connects it to her ability to achieve her future goals by stating "It's important because I wanna like, I wanna graduate, I wanna like, you know do well and just go to college and stuff" (Interview of Participant 1). She wants to have a career related to law enforcement, "I wanna have a family. And I also want to be like, a police officer or like a detective or something like that" and she further informs on her plans by sharing she wants to train to become a police officer. Participant 5's responses regarding the importance of education for future outcomes align with themes that emerged from this study. She states, "For going to school. To help us get a better life. To give us a push that like people coming into America don't usually don't normally always get like education" (Interview of

Participant 5). This demonstrates an awareness of the role that education plays regarding socioeconomic mobility which could possibly be influenced by her family's experiences and background.

What also becomes clear from the data analysis is that students often lack clarity on their plans, or they are influenced by immediate financial concerns. This can be seen in their responses relating to working as a cashier to make money or working a part-time job to support their post-secondary education. Participant 4 makes mention of not having an entirely clear picture of what his future or five-year plan would be post-high school. He states, "I'm not very sure about that, but I imagine like, like doing a small job so I can make enough money to maybe like get into like a better school (Interview of Participant 4). This uncertainty about his future plans reflects the challenges faced by this student from a low-SES background in envisioning what his future and career trajectories look like. The literature discussed in previous chapters aligns with this idea in that students' perceptions of the importance of school and education in shaping their future. The literature highlights the impact that SES has on aspects related to school such as academic achievement and academic motivation. Some of the participants in this research recognized the importance of education for success in the future while others struggled to communicate its applicability beyond immediate outcomes and immediate financial needs. Perhaps this is due to each of their unique familial backgrounds as well as their individual agency and resilience. Participant 2 shares that she wants to get into a good college and have a good career. "The school is very important for me so I can get into a good college to get into a good career" (Interview of Participant 2). Participant 2 emphasizes education's importance in securing a reputable career. She has an awareness

of the connection between education and socioeconomic mobility. This may stem from her SES background as higher education is seen as a pathway to positive future outcomes. The literature supports both ends of this spectrum in claiming that the family background of the student relates significantly to student motivation to perform well in school. And opposite from this, additional research was conducted that indicates that a student's motivation to learn is individual and not connected to their familial background (Gaztambide-Fernández, 2009; Liu & Chiang, 2019).

Specifically, regarding parental influence, it is important to acknowledge the role that parental involvement plays based on the data collected through this research. While the research study did not explicitly examine this topic, it is mentioned in the literature review, and it is touched upon in the responses given by the students in the interviews. The literature review portrays parental involvement as a critical factor in molding students' attitudes toward education. The literature stresses the influence that parents have on students' academic motivation. In the data collected, students mention aspirations that their parents have for them as well as the expectations that they have set forth. Participant 3 shares that he and his mother discuss his future as an entrepreneur however, his ideas about his future are not fully developed. "I really want to do that but I haven't you know, have fully developed the idea of what I should do to make a business. That's why. And if that doesn't go well, then I am in football activities and I love football" (Interview with Participant 3). This demonstrates that his future goals are influenced by conversations with his mother, highlighting the role that parents place in shaping careers. This is a prime example of how SES presents systemic issues, however,

it doesn't define a student as not being able to develop and achieve aspirations about their future.

Participant 5 refers to her parents' goals for her referring to the influence of expectations set by parents regarding a child's educational pursuit. The student said "My mom is a nurse; she works in the hospital. I think my mom did [go to college] my dad though in this country or another country]" (Interview of Participant 5). This quote suggests that the student's parents may hope for her to attain a higher level of education as well. This data also indicated varying levels of parental engagement. Students' responses range from discussing parents who have a strong desire for their child to succeed in school while other participants may face challenges due to the limited parental involvement or disengaged behavior the parents have toward education. This may be a result of a lack of knowledge and education on the parents' part or an inability to be involved due to working one or multiple jobs to support their family. Parental influence can look different depending on the situation, student, and circumstance. Participant 4's parental influence is conveyed in the form of the student displaying a desire to contribute to the well-being of his family. He states, "I find it important because I want to like earn a degree to help my parents out because my father is getting old" (Interview of Participant 4). In this situation, the student is influenced by the desire to be helpful to his family. It was established in the literature review in chapter two that research exists that supports that a relationship is present between student achievement and SES (Aikens & Barbarin, 2008; Chen et al., 2018) while other literature contradicts and implicates this notion by divulging that SES has no consequence or influence on students' academic achievement (Chen et al., 2018; Ripple & Luthar, 2000). While further research in this area should

collect additional data from observations and student work samples, the information that was collected does point to low and concerning grades for some of the participants in their math courses. This is not a result of their SES per se, but it is important to acknowledge that factors from their circumstances can influence their ability to reach their fullest potential. It is not clear what the driving factor is behind this however, as stated numerous times, students do not clearly understand the necessity for learning some skills or the connection and impact they have on their future. This could play into a lack of motivation within the classes for students to achieve higher grades. Subsequently, motivation related to teacher-student connections also plays a role in students' success and motivation in the classroom. Brandmiller and colleagues' (2020) research explores teachers' perceptions of learning motivation and classroom behavior. Their literature demonstrates that students with higher SES are perceived by their teachers as having a higher motivation in terms of their learning than their lower-SES peers. The literature discussed in Chapter 2 also refers to students' perceptions of the beliefs that teachers have established related to students and their backgrounds. The literature indicates that this corresponds to identity-based motivational outcomes of students and links students from lower-SES homes to have more awareness of the perceptions and beliefs established by their teachers about them.

It's essential to also examine the potential connections between students' grades and their understanding of the relevance of certain subjects to their future. When closely analyzing Participant 1's interview transcript, it becomes evident that the student is aware, to some degree, of the importance of education for their future outcomes. She declares that math is her favorite subject because she finds it easy. She has a confidence

level regarding her math skills and abilities which is aligned with her focus and engagement in the classroom. Strikingly though, she was not able to articulate a clear connection between math and science and her future. Connecting back to the identity-based motivation theory, the student's perceptions of varying subjects' importance may be directly influenced by her background and individual identity. She is a lower-SES student who may, as demonstrated by the various data points, face systemic and structural barriers that influence her beliefs regarding her abilities as a student. This may also be the cause of her inability to articulate a specific subject's ability to impact her future. Participant 3 expresses liking math and English and goes on to explain that math is important to his future career as an entrepreneur. He also makes mention of the skills taught in English and their relevance to the world. This same interest does not exist for the subjects of social studies and science as he feels that they are less relevant to his long-term goals. The observation of the student as well as the work samples highlights the aforementioned. It is interesting to consider if a student consistently receives high marks in math and English but lower marks in science and social studies, there may be a correlation between the perceived subject relevance and academic performance. Closely examining these ideas through the lens of the identify-based motivation theory allows researchers to acknowledge valuable insights that are revealed. According to Destin and Oyserman (2010), student motivation is influenced by the extent to which student identities align with social contexts. Looking at Participant 3, his future desires to become an entrepreneur align with math and English as he finds them directly related to his future. This alignment may be the reason a student receives higher grades. If the

participant views his background as a strength that supports his success, he may be more motivated to achieve in those areas.

Limitations

There are a few limitations to this study that are worthy of noting. First, the sample size of this study was small with only five students. The study embraced the transcendental phenomenological approach to closely examine students' experiences in a detailed and thorough manner. A larger sample size could have provided additional data related to the themes that emerged or could have resulted in additional data results that did not present with the small sample size used in this research.

Another limitation of this study is that the observations of the students were conducted in one 47-minute class period session. It is believed that observing these students over the course of a few months and conducting multiple 47-minute observations of each participant would have provided more significant information and data than what was ascertained from the one observation that was conducted. Further, interviewing the parents to gain a deeper and more comprehensive understanding of their background and history could certainly provide beneficial and crucial information to understanding more about the student participants. This information may provide the researcher with an insight into why students value certain aspects of education and not others or why students responded to certain questions the way they did. This can also alert the researcher to more information about the family, the SES background, and parents' aspirations for their children. One last limitation pertaining to the study conducted is that the research included participants only from one grade in one district. Having a sample

size that included various grades and perhaps students from a variety of districts,

therefore caution is advised when generalizing the results of this study.

Implications

The findings from this study offer valuable insights that can inform curriculum

design, teaching practices, and support services for students from low-SES backgrounds.

Student voice is not consistently considered when policies, procedures, and curricula are

reviewed and generated. This research provides a more intimate, personal, and up-close

view and understanding of what students feel about education, why they feel a specific

way, and their understanding of the importance of education toward their futures.

Ladson-Billings (2006) said it best when she described why it is necessary to address

educational debt and what implications it has on the future:

> I want to suggest that there are three primary reasons for addressing the debt-(a)
>
> the impact the debt has on present education progress, (b) the value of
>
> understanding the debt in relation to past education research findings, and (c) the
>
> potential for forging a better educational future (p. 9).

Taking a closer look at each of these we see just how important they are for the success

and future of these students. The impact on present education progress is directly

influenced by educational debt. Key stakeholders must address this by implementing

strategies to minimize its impact on students. This can be in the form of resources,

expanding on and creating more opportunities for students who may be disadvantaged

and providing schools with more support. If policymakers and district administration take

the time to understand past education research data and literature about the educational

debt, root causes may become clear which will help to drive future decisions as well as

change and shift mindsets regarding this topic. With this information, interventions, policies, and practices can be revised, implemented, and executed with the students' specific needs at heart. If stakeholders rectify and address the disparities that exist, the journey towards a system of equal opportunity can be paved allowing for a more equitable and inclusive educational system to transform.

Incorporating Student Voice

When making decisions regarding curriculum, involving a key group of students in the discussion process behind the decision-making may provide key stakeholders with insight into students' perceptions and understanding of the material and its significance to their future. The data collected provides invaluable insights into students' values, beliefs, and perceptions toward education's ability to impact their future. By extending the opportunity to students and providing them a platform to have a voice by including them in decision-making processes, all stakeholders can gain a more comprehensive understanding of students' needs and aspirations. In addition to empowering students from low-SES backgrounds, students may, stakeholders now information to help guide decisions related to curriculum. If courses and curricula are designed with the idea that students need to have a better understanding of the specific role the content and skills will play in the future, we may come to see a direct correlation to higher grades and more student engagement. As stated throughout the paper, students demonstrated an understanding that classes teach important skills. The research also points to a need to teach students to be able to generalize the skills and material taught and how it can be applied to real-world applications. The curriculum should be generated with this focus in mind. If students can understand from an early age the connection between the subjects

and real-world situations, they may be more engaged, receive higher grades, and gain a more global understanding of education's ability to impact the future outside of school. Educators and key policymakers should make every effort to include students from low-SES homes in the decision-making process related to curriculum. Establishing a Shared Decision-Making Committee would be a great way to allow students to participate in these important decisions. By allowing them to be involved in this manner, students would be given a platform to be heard. Their voices, perspectives, and opinions would be considered and would influence decisions that would ultimately impact them. Course design would ensure a connection between subjects and real-world situations. Establishing this from an early age would allow schools to help students foster a more global understanding of education's impact on their future outcomes.

Parental Involvement

The data collected reveals varying levels of parental involvement and support as shared by the participants during their interviews. Participants mentioned the level of engagement and ability of their parents to provide them with assistance with their schoolwork. The literature further explains some of the disparities that exist between students of low-SES homes and higher-SES homes including having parents who work multiple jobs, parents with lower levels of completed education, access to less educational materials, less access to public libraries, and limited exposure to real-world experiences (Burney & Beilke, 2008; Evans, 2004; Wagner et al., 2014). Knowing that these gaps and barriers exist, school districts and key stakeholders can develop targeted interventions to support students from low-SES homes. These initiatives may include but are not limited to providing more equitable access to educational resources and fostering

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positive parent-school partnerships by creating opportunities to have parents become more involved with their child's school beyond special events that occur throughout the year. Stakeholders may also consider creating adult education courses for parents to inform them of the college and career readiness process. Policymakers may want to consider creating workshops tailored to topics that may be of interest to the lower-SES families such as navigating high school and beyond, how to access financial aid, and how to traverse through the educational system. Schools may also want to create more opportunities for family engagement. The key stakeholders should explore ways in which they can create opportunities for parents, teachers, community members, and administrators to interact. Such events may include but are not limited to multi-cultural nights, parent-teacher conferences, concerts, shows, STEM fairs, literacy nights, health and fitness nights, and art exhibits. This would allow opportunities for the district to focus on and highlight areas of strength for students and show off the work they have excelled in thus demonstrating that SES is a factor and does not define a child's ability to flourish. Another way to expand parent involvement is by creating a parent resource center in the school. This resource center can be easily accessible to parents, and it would be a place where they can access materials related to education, computer resources, and community-based resources. Materials would be available in multiple languages to ensure all families are able to access the information. Schools can also help to foster parent involvement by fostering regular communication between teachers and parents. This can be established in the form of phone calls, emails, Remind App messages, newsletters, and websites. Finally, schools may want to consider allowing parents to volunteer to assist during school events and activities. By allowing parents to attend trips,

participate in school projects, and assist in the classroom, the school would be recognizing the importance of having parents involved with the school community.

The data collected also yielded information about students' and parents' backgrounds including information about parents' completed level of education, jobs, and if foreign to this country, the year and age that they entered the United States. The educational background of the parents varied across participants ranging from high school to college degrees. The disparity that exists in the educational attainment of parents may influence parental expectations for both children's academic achievement and future career opportunities. Districts and stakeholders should create adult education programs to educate parents on the college and career process in the United States. Parents should be familiar with the requirements for students to apply to college as well as other opportunities that exist for students who may not decide to enter college. Parents cannot advise their children if they themselves are not aware of the processes that exist. Schools can conduct workshops and other support opportunities to prepare and guide parents from when their children are younger to best provide for them and support them later on.

As noted in the interviews, some students had a clear sense of what they wanted to do in the future while others lacked a defined plan. That being said and considering what has been said about recognizing the connection between skills and future jobs, the district may want to delve deeper into the diverse career aspirations of their students. While software programs exist that help with career and college readiness, the programs, (a) should be implemented at a younger age to begin the conversation about students' futures and, (b) should be mandated and/or used widely by districts. Incorporating this

type of software and program into students' middle school years can help provide direction for students as well as begin to close the gap between what they are learning and why it is important for them to learn. Additionally, these programs may provide stakeholders with an understanding of the factors that influence students' career choices and the specific skills they associate with success in those careers. This information could provide valuable insight for future educational planning, curriculum, and courses offered.

Recommendations for Future Research

Understanding students' perceptions of education's ability to impact their future provides educators and key stakeholders with pertinent information that can help improve, advise, and change practices to best meet students' needs. That being said, while this research provides vital information regarding how students perceive aspects of education, their understanding of the importance of specific subjects, and the five-year plan of five students from low-SES homes, there are a few recommendations for future research recognized by the researcher.

Future research in this area may explore a comparison between the experiences and perceptions of students from low-SES homes with those from high-SES backgrounds. Understanding both the similarities and differences that exist can help tailor curriculum, support services, and interventions more effectively. During the interviews the participants briefly discussed and addressed relationships between students and teachers, this research study barely scratched the surface of this valuable and paramount topic. Future research may look to investigate the role that teachers play in shaping the students from low-SES homes perceptions of the importance of education for their future.

The research may consider exploring the teacher-student relationship and how it impacts students' personal growth and aspirations.

As stated above, the research did not track students over a set length of time, and in fact, the researcher recognizes that having done so may have provided additional data and information to support the research question and guide additional research. That being said, another recommendation for future research would be to conduct a longitudinal study that would allow the researcher to track academic and post-high school trajectories of students from low-SES homes over a longer period. This would allow for a more extensive and panoramic understanding of the long-term impact of education on students' lives. It would also allow the researcher to identify if students' perceptions from earlier on in their educational journey became reality and/or influenced their future outcomes.

APPENDIX A District Permission

UNION-FREE SCHOOL DISTRICT

June 6, 2023

To Whom It May Concern,

I am writing to request approval for Fallon Rubin to conduct her dissertation research in the Lawrence ██████ Fallon is a current supervisor of special education services, and she has been working in the district for over 10 years. She is a highly respected educator with a deep commitment to her students and their families.

I believe that Fallon's research is important and that it will make a valuable contribution to the field of education. I am confident that she will conduct her research in an ethical and responsible manner, and I am committed to supporting her through this phase of her dissertation process and beyond.

Thank you.

Sincerely,

Superintendent of Schools

APPENDIX B Parental Consent Form

Dear Parent/Guardian of Participant,

Your child has been invited to take part in a research study to learn more about how perceptions of education impact students' school performance. This study will be conducted by Fallon Rubin, School of Education, Department of Education Specialties, St. John's University, as part of her qualitative research class. Her faculty sponsor is Dr. Brett Blake, Professor at St. John's University.

If you agree to have your child participate in this study, your child will be asked to do the following:

1. take part in an interview concerning his/her understanding of education's ability to impact his/her future.
2. be observed in mathematics class and English Language Arts class.
3. provide classwork/artifacts to reviewed.

Your consent will also give Fallon permission to access the registration packets found in the school office that was completed you by you upon registering your child for school.

Your child's interview will be audio-recorded. You and your child may review these recordings and request that all or any portion of the tapes be destroyed.

Participation in this study will involve approximately one hour of your child's time minutes to complete the interview. Additionally, the classroom observations will take place in one 47-minute class period.

There are no known risks associated with your participation in this research beyond those of everyday life.

Although you will receive no direct benefits, this research may help the investigator to better understand the relationship between students' perception of education and school performance.

Confidentiality of research records will be strictly maintained by removing your child's name and any identifiers will be replaced with a pseudonym. Consent forms will be stored in a locked file in a separate location from interview documentation. All recordings will be kept confidential and destroyed at the completion of this research study. All of your responses will be kept confidential with the exception of following: the researcher is required by law to report to the appropriate authorities, suspicion of harm to yourself, to children, or to others. Your child's responses will be kept confidential by the researcher.

Participation in this study is voluntary. You and/or your child may refuse to participate or withdraw from this study at any time without penalty. For interviews and questionnaires, your child has the right to skip or not answer any questions that he/she prefers not to answer.

Nonparticipation or withdrawal will not affect your child's grades or academic standing in their classes.

If there is anything about this study or your participation that is unclear or that you do not understand, if you have questions or wish to report a research-related problem, you may contact Fallon Rubin, Fallon.Rubin20@my.stjohns.edu, St. John's University 8000 Utopia Parkway, Queens NY, 11439 or the faculty sponsor, Dr. Brett Blake, at BBlake@stjohns.edu St. John's University, Sullivan Hall 4th Floor, 8000 Utopia Parkway, Queens NY, 11439.

For questions about your rights as a research participant, you may contact the University's Institutional Review Board, St. John's University, Dr. Raymond DiGuiseppe, Chair digiuser@stjohns.edu 718-990-1955.

You have received a copy of this consent document to keep.

<u>Agreement to Participate</u>

_____   _____
    Parent/Guardian Signature   Date

APPENDIX C Student Consent Form

Dear Student,

You have been selected and invited to take part in a research study to learn more about how you feel education impacts your future. This study will be conducted by Fallon Rubin, School of Education, Department of Education Specialties, St. John's University, as part of her qualitative research class. Her faculty sponsor is Dr. Brett Blake, Professor at St. John's University.

If you agree to participate in this study, you will be asked to do the following:

4. take part in an interview where you will be asked questions about how you feel about school and education.
5. be observed in mathematics class and/or English Language Arts class.
6. provide classwork/artifacts to be reviewed.

Your consent will also permit Fallon to access the registration packets found in the school office that were completed by your parent upon them registering you for school.

Your interview will be audio-recorded. You may review these recordings at any time, and you may request that all or any portion of the tapes be destroyed.

Participation in this study will involve approximately one hour or less of your time to complete the interview. Additionally, the classroom observations will take place in one 47-minute class period.

There are no known risks associated with your participation in this research beyond those of everyday life.

Although you will receive no direct benefits, this research may help the investigator to better understand the relationship between students' perception of education and school performance.

Confidentiality of research records will be strictly maintained by removing your name from any documents and information. Consent forms will be stored in a locked file in a separate location from interview documentation. All recordings will be kept confidential and destroyed at the completion of this research study. All of your responses will be kept confidential with the exception of following: the researcher is required by law to report to the appropriate authorities, suspicion of harm to yourself, to children, or to others. Your responses will be kept confidential by the researcher.

Participation in this study is voluntary. You may refuse to participate or withdraw from this study at any time without penalty. For interviews, and questionnaires, you have the right to skip or not answer any questions that you prefer not to answer.

Nonparticipation or withdrawal will not affect your grades or academic standing in classes.

If there is anything about this study or your participation that is unclear or that you do not understand, if you have questions or wish to report a research-related problem, you may contact Fallon Rubin, Fallon.Rubin20@my.stjohns.edu, St. John's University 8000 Utopia Parkway, Queens NY, 11439 or the faculty sponsor, Dr. Brett Blake, at BBlake@stjohns.edu St. John's University, Sullivan Hall 4th Floor, 8000 Utopia Parkway, Queens NY, 11439.

For questions about your rights as a research participant, you may contact the University's Institutional Review Board, St. John's University, Dr. Raymond DiGuiseppe, Chair digiuser@stjohns.edu 718-990-1955 Coordinator.

You have received a copy of this consent document to keep.

<u>Agreement to Participate</u>

_____
   Student Signature

APPENDIX D Semi-Structured Interview Questions

Hi Sally (Pseudonym), my name is Fallon and I am a doctoral candidate in the Literacy Program at St. John's University, School of Education. I am also a school administrator in this school district.

I want to thank you for taking the time to meet with me today and for agreeing to participate in this study. The purpose of this interview is for me to learn more about your perception and understanding of education's ability to impact your future. I will be asking you a series of questions that relate to this topic.

I want to remind you that I will be recording this interview, so I have all of the details that you shared with me today. Do I have your permission to record the interview?

As a reminder, our conversation is completely confidential. While your answers may be incorporated into my findings, you will not be identified by name in the final manuscript. You may choose to stop the interview at any point, and you may also skip any question that you do not wish to answer.

Before we begin, I want to confirm that your parent/guardian signed a copy of the consent form. [If the participant signed the consent, ask the following question] Do you have any questions about the consent form?

Do you have any questions for me at this time?

Do I have your permission to begin the interview? I will begin the recording now.

1. What grade are you in?
2. What is your favorite subject in school and why?
3. How important is school to you?
4. What do you envision yourself doing in the future?
5. What is your five-year plan post-school?
6. Please share what you find to be the most rewarding part of attending school.
7. What advice would you give to an elementary-aged student about middle school?
8. Describe aspects of school that you like.
   a. To what extent are these positive aspects class-specific?
9. Describe any aspects of school that you dislike.
   a. To what extent are these dislikes class-specific?
10. To what extent can you describe the relationship you have with your peers in school?

11. To what extent can you describe the relationship you have with your teachers in school?
12. To what extent can you describe how what you are learning in:
    a. math and how it impacts your future.
    b. science and how impacts your future.
    c. social studies and how it impacts your future.
    d. English and how it impacts your future.
13. What makes successful people successful?
14. What do you think the reason for going to school is?

That concludes our interview for today. Before I end the recording, do you have anything else that you would like to share with me about your perception of education's ability to impact your future. Thank you again for your time and contribution to my research. Please reach out to me if you have any questions. I will be ending the recording now.

APPENDIX E Participant 1 Interview Transcript

Interviewer: Ready? Okay, can you share with me what grade you were in? And can you tell me what your favorite subject is in school and why?

Participant 1: Hmm. My favorite subject is math Because I find it really easy.

Interviewer: Do you enjoy the math class that you're in currently?

Participant 1: Yes

Interviewer: Okay, and do you find the math work to come too easy?

Participant 1: Yes, I feel like I do a good job in the class.

Interviewer: You don't have any difficulty with it?

Participant 1: Not really.

Interviewer: Okay, perfect. How important is school to you?

Participant 1: It's important because I wanna like, I wanna graduate, I wanna like, you know do well and just Go to college and stuff.

Interviewer: Okay, perfect. What do you envision yourself doing in the future?

Participant 1: Hmm. Going to college.

Interviewer: So when you think about after college and after or at whatever your plan is after school, what do you see yourself doing?

Participant 1: I, I wanna have a family.

Interviewer: Okay.

Participant 1: And I also want to be like, a police or like a detective or something like that.

Interviewer: Okay, amazing. What is your 5 year plan post school?

Participant 1: umm.

Interviewer: Do you understand the question?

Participant 1: Can you ask again?

Interviewer: So after you graduate high school, what are you going to do immediately after high school in those first 5 years?

Participant 1: Train to like be a police. Yeah.

Interviewer - Okay, amazing. Can you share what you find to be the most rewarding part of attending school?

Participant 1: I don't understand the question.

Interviewer: Like, so when I say rewarding, how do I rephrase this? What do you find to be like special about school or something that's very valuable about school?

Participant 1: The fact that you could like meet new people like interact with people and it'll help you like later on in life.

Interviewer: Amazing. Perfect. What do you mean by help you later on in life?

Participant 1: Like, if you want a certain job, maybe it can help you. The relationships that you build in school.

Interviewer: Excellent. Okay. What advice would you give to an elementary-age student about middle school?

Interviewer: If a fifth grader walked in here right now or fourth grade, what advice would you give them about middle school?

Participant 1: To not like get in trouble and just try to like focus and try as hard as you can.

Interviewer: Okay, excellent.

Interviewer: Can you describe what aspects of school you like? What are things about school that you really like?

Participant 1: Hanging out with my friends.

Interviewer: And can you share with me to what extent your relationship with your friends is class specific?

Participant 1: I am not sure.

Interviewer: Meaning, are you, you said that the aspect of school that you like is your friends? Does that have anything to do with your classes or are they unrelated? Like where do you hang out with your friends in school?

Participant 1: Like, I have them in like classes.

Interviewer: In classes are you hanging out with them? Are you hanging out with them at other times during the day?

Participant 1: Like maybe I'll talk to them or like, you know, if it's like group work or something or just like at lunch recess.

Interviewer: Okay, perfect. And can you share with me to what extent you can describe the relationship you have with your peers in school? So share with me about your friendships in school.

Participant 1: They're pretty like, it's like good.

Interviewer: Talk to me a little bit about your friend group.

Participant 1: Like we all go out a lot and we try as much to like so we don't leave someone out; making sure that everybody feels, yeah, part of the group, yeah.

Interviewer: Okay, and how many friends do you say you have in your friends group?

Participant 1: Like 4, 5.

Interviewer: Okay, are they all girls?

Participant 1: Yeah

Interviewer: And can you share with me to what extent you, can describe the relationship you, can describe the relationship you have with your teachers? Like is it a positive relationship or negative, like talk to me a little bit about the relationships you've had with your teachers in middle school, if you have relationships with them.

Participant 1: It's pretty good. Like, okay, you know. I don't know how to explain like.

Interviewer: Try and then I can ask more.

Participant 1: I don't really have like.

Interviewer: So like for example when I was in school I remember a teacher that I felt very comfortable going in for extra help if I needed. I never felt uncomfortable asking questions in that class, but there was one class where I had a teacher who wasn't very kind in class and so I didn't feel like I had a good relationship with them. I didn't want to ask questions. I was kind of kept to myself in the back. So talk to me a little bit about that. Like are there teachers you feel more comfortable with and what classes are those in and are there teachers where you prefer to not really interact with them and why?

Participant 1: Some teachers like I like to like I'll like raise my hand. I like, you know. Well, I volunteer for stuff and other teachers. I'll just like stay quiet or sometimes I just like. I like like I'll get scared to like show up to class. I'll be like, I don't wanna go like, why?

Interviewer: That's good. Why? Tell me why.

Participant 1: Because sometimes they'll be like If they say something, sometimes they'll say it towards me or they'll give me like that look like if they say something it'll be like towards you or something.

Interviewer: What do you mean? Can you give an example? Like if they're giving you a look, why are they giving you a look? Was it beause you were talking when you shouldn't have been? Like what is the look they're giving you for what reason?

Participant 1: Because okay, so there was like sometimes I wouldn't show up to class, right? Okay and they would just be like oh, you gotta start showing up or this and that, but you try to say it to like the whole class, but then they'd always give me that like. Or you always gotta show up like you know they're saying it's a whole class.

Interviewer: But you knew it was directed yeah at you? And why weren't you showing up?

Participant 1: Because I don't know, like I don't know, I just.

Interviewer: Where were you going if you weren't showing up?

Participant 1: Last year, I would just like skip or I'd go to gym or whatever. But this year I'm actually trying to like actually stay in that class. Like. So far this year I've been staying in it and I've tried to do the work.

Interviewer: And why? What changed between last year and this year?

Participant 1: Cause last year I was like I don't know, last year I got in trouble too much, like. I got into fights or arguments and I didn't really like that. So I try to stop and I'm actually like trying not like too good in attendance and like works for work and everything.

Interviewer: Why?

Participant 1: So I could like graduate and that'll help me.

Interviewer: Excellent, perfect. Thank you. That's awesome. I'm glad to hear that you've made that change because it really is important. That's great.

Interviewer: So how do you envision what you're learning in math impacting your future?

Interviewer: Like, do you make a connection between what you're learning in the future, that kind of a thing?

Participant 1: I don't really know.

Interviewer: Okay. Can you share with me the answer, the same question but for science, to what extent can you describe how what you are learning in science will impact your future?

Interviewer: Like do you think what you're learning in science is going to have any impact on your future after you graduate?

Participant 1: I mean it can but I don't know like how yeah.

Interviewer: Okay that's fine and can you describe to what extent what you are learning inside social studies and how it impacts your future?

Participant 1: Social studies like you could just I feel like you can know more about like what happened like before. Yeah, man, I don't know how to explain it.

Interviewer: Is, is that important to your future, wat you're learning in social studies?

Participant 1: Yes because you learn history from the past.

Interviewer: Okay. And what about English? To what extent can you describe how about your learning in English will impact your future?

Participant 1: Okay, I know that it can, but like I just don't know how.

Interviewer: Yeah, okay, that's fine. A few more questions. Okay, can you share with me what makes a successful person successful?

Interviewer: What does success look like to you? Somebody who's successful, what does that look like? What does it mean to be successful?

Participant 1: I don't like, I know, but I don't have like the words.

Interviewer: When you think about like celebrities, right? Do you think celebrities are successful?

Participant 1: I feel like it depends.

Interviewer: Oh, why?

Participant 1: Like what they do in life.

Interviewer: Good.

Participant 1: And how it's like. A good or bad thing like. Like if it's good or maybe it helped someone and like they became like for if like for example like famous or whatever for it. And like or doing a good job in life, I feel like they're successful for like because what they did at some point. Or like, probably help someone or whatever.

Interviewer: Okay, excellent. So if you think about now, forget celebrities, think about like everyday people that we surround ourselves with, what makes them successful?

Long pause

Interviewer: What makes like an everyday person successful? There's not a right or wrong answer. Again, there's no wrong or right. To you, what makes an everyday person successful?

Long pause

Interviewer: Like who do you live in home with?

Participant 1: My mom, my dad, my sister, or mom and dad successful?

Interviewer: So first tell me, are they successful?

Participant 1: Yeah

Interviewer Why?

Participant 1: Because like they do their jobs and.

Interviewer: Okay, so is what you are saying that somebody you're saying somebody who's successful can help somebody. Someone who is successful is someone that does their job? describe to me a little bit more about success or tell me what means that somebody's not successful.

Interviewer: Like what does it mean to not be successful?

Participant 1: I don't know.

Interviewer: Do you want to be successful when you get older?

Participant 1: Yeah

Interviewer: and how are you going to be successful?

Participant 1: I just, like when I'm older I just I don't know, like, cause I wanna be like, you know, I say police. Feel like by helping people like this or like Just doing like little things I feel like in life for like good. That would be good.

Interviewer: Perfect. And last question, what do you think the reason is for going to school?

Participant 1: To help you like with your education like certain things can help you later on in life. Like if you want to like learn something like a certain subject maybe can help you with what

Interviewer: What is it going to help you with later on?

Participant 1: Your job, your career and stuff.

Interviewer: Okay, excellent. So, is there anything else that you want to share with me about how you see your future, why or why not you think education is important?

Participant 1: No

Interviewer: Okay, perfect. So that concludes our interview for today. Before I end the recordings, you have anything else that you would like to share with me about your perception of education's ability to impact your future?

Participant 1: No

Interviewer: Anything at all that you think would be important for me to understand about how you view education.

Participant 1: No.

Interviewer: Thank you again for your time and your contribution to my research and please reach out to me if you have any questions and I'm going to end the recording right now.

Participant 1: Okay.

APPENDIX F Participant 2 Interview Transcript

Interviewer: I'm going to begin the recording now.

Interviewer: Okay, so can you share with me what grade you're in?

Participant 2: 8th grade

Interviewer: Perfect. And what is your favorite subject in school and why?

Participant 2: My favorite subject is either social studies or math because I like classes mostly if the teachers are nice and they explain well or if I'm good at the subject and I'm good at math and social studies and I like both of the teachers.

Interviewer: Awesome. Did you like math and social studies before this school year?

Participant 2: Yeah, I liked them for the same reasons. Yeah.

Interviewer: Excellent. Can you share with me how important school is to you?

Participant 2: The school is very important for me so I can get into a good college to get into a good career.

Interviewer: Okay, excellent. And what do you envision yourself doing in the future?

Participant 2: I envision myself, as an actress and writer or a director because I like acting and I I like writing and I would like to direct my own book that I make and also be able to act in it I also want to run for president.

Interviewer: Oh, wow, excellent. Very nice. So you hope to write a book and then direct the book as a movie. That's amazing. And you want to become president?

Participant 2: Yeah

Interviewer: That's incredible. Very nice.

Interviewer: So what is your five-year plan post-school? So once you graduate high school, for the first 5 years what do you see is your plan?

Participant 2: The first 5 years after graduating high school, I see myself in college studying whatever I decide to study, probably one of those things that I said, maybe all of them. So I don't know how long all of that will take so I'll probably be doing that.

Interviewer: Okay, excellent. Are you going to work while you're in college or you're just going to go to college?

Participant 2: I think I might work a part-time job just to make a little extra income. And yeah.

Interviewer: Okay, beautiful.

Interviewer: Can you share with me what you find to be the most rewarding part of attending school?

Participant 2: The most rewarding part about attending school is getting to learn new things and getting to hang out with like friends and stuff and I think that's really fun.

Interviewer: Okay, beautiful. Can you share with me what advice you would give to an elementary-age student about middle school?

Participant 2: The advice that I would give is if you pay attention, then it's not going to be that hard as people might say. You just have to pay attention and do your work and your homework.

Interviewer: Okay, perfect. Can you share with me what aspects of school you like?

Participant 2: The aspects of school I like is like the extracurriculars and stuff because I I like joining sports, clubs and I also get extra time to hang out with my friends, but I use generally like joining all of that stuff.

Interviewer: Okay, excellent. And can you share with me what what aspects of school you dislike?

Participant 2: The aspects of school I don't like is when like is one I don't like, I don't. I don't know.

Interviewer: It's okay if there's nothing that you just like about school, that's okay.

Participant 2: No, like I'm trying to think. No, not really anything.

Interviewer Nothing. You like everything about school?

Participant 2: Yeah, basically everything.

Interviewer: That's great. That makes me very happy to hear. Can you share with me to what extent you can describe the relationship you have with your peers?

Participant 2: In school, the relationship I have with my peers is pretty good because I'm friendly and I make friends easily. I make new friends because I just look too. So I think it's pretty good the relationship between me and my peers. And I think that's good for me too because I want to run for president of the student government too.

Interviewer: Excellent. Very nice. I'm happy to hear that. Can you share with me to what extent you have a relationship with your teachers in school?

Participant 2: I think I have a good relationship with my teachers because I'm kind of like, I raise my hand a lot, like if I don't understand something I'll probably say it. I think my teachers like me too because I do my work, I do my homework and I do good on tests. And I think they like me because I need endorsement for president and basically all my teachers endorsed me. None of them have said no.

Interviewer: So that's amazing. Awesome. At home, do you live with mom and dad or mom and dad?

Participant 2: Yes, with mom and dad.

Interviewer: Do they help you with your homework?

Participant 2: I don't usually need help but if I do, I ask my parents if they understand something, like if they can help me. And if they can't, I just call up a friend or I search it up.

Interviewer: Excellent. And do mom and dad work or no?

Participant 2: Yeah, they both work.

Interviewer: What do they do?

Participant 2: My dad? I'm not very sure but they both work.

Interviewer: Okay, excellent. Do they do they talk to you about work at all.

Participant 2: Umm, not really. They just kind of do their thing while I'm at school.

Interviewer: Are they home when you get home?

Participant 2: Not all the time because I have, well, most of the time because I need someone to pick me up from my sports and my clubs.

Interviewer: Okay. So there one of them are home if you did need help with your homework that they would be able to help you.

Participant 2: Yeah, because they have to pick me up.

Interviewer: Excellent. Do you have siblings or no?

Participant 2: Yeah, I have a little brother. He's 7 months old. He was born in February, 21.

Interviewer: Very nice. Yeah. So it's just you and your little brother?

Participant 2: Yeah, I have a half-brother in California, but you know, we don't talk that much.

Interviewer: And do you help take care of your little brother?

Participant 2: Yeah. I love my little brother.

Interviewer: I'm happy to hear that. Can you share with me to what extent you, you can describe what you are learning in math and how it impacts your future?

Participant 2: What I am learning in math currently is geometry.

Interviewer: And how do you think that impacts your future, if at all?

Participant 2: I think it impacts my future because I need to learn that stuff because what if I need to buy something and I won't know the measurements if I don't remember the information from my math class.

Interviewer: Okay excellent and share with me the same thing about science, how does what you're learning in science impact your future?

Participant 2: In science we're learning about like all different kinds of things living environment and I think that's important because maybe like one day I'm outside and then I see like a bird or something and it's wounded maybe I could help it because of what I'm learning.

Interviewer: Beautiful. And how does what you're learning in social studies impact your future if at all?

Participant 2: I think learning social studies is important because that way I don't repeat history because it's important to know your history.

Interviewer: Beautiful, great answers and can you share the same thing about English? How does what you are learning in English impact your future?

Participant 2: I think learning English is important because you have to know how to like write stuff like correctly, correct grammar, like for job applications, for college, like you just need it.

Interviewer Beautiful. And can you share with me what makes a successful person successful?

Participant 2: What makes a successful person successful is being like hardworking and like focusing on what you need to do. Having kind of an organized state.

Interviewer: Okay, excellent and as an adult what makes somebody successful?

Participant 2: As an adult what makes someone successful is if you work hard at what you want to do or at what you are doing.

Interviewer: Okay, excellent. And last question is what do you think is the reason for going to school?

Participant 2: I think the reason for going to school is so children have knowledge of what like the world is and what they can do to help the world.

Interviewer: Okay, perfect. That concludes our interview for today. Before I end the recording, do you have anything else that you would like to share with me about your perception of education's ability to impact your future?

Participant 2: I don't think so. Oh, well, I do say like if you're joining little school or something, I feel like it's important to have at least one extracurricular because that could help you in getting into college and it can also be really fun activities to do.

Interviewer: Excellent. I actually have a few more question for you. How did you learn that doing extracurricular activities could help you with your college applications?

Participant 2: I think I just kind of knew or I don't know, I don't know honestly, I don't know how I found out about it. Maybe a teacher told me, maybe my mom told me, maybe I figured it out but even before I know about that, I would always join all the clubs because I thought I would just see it when I was in like third or fourth grade and I would say hey oh that looks fun, I am going to join that and I would join like everything that I could

Interviewer: Okay, perfect. They have so many clubs in high school for you to join as well. Thank you for your contribution to my research. If you have any questions for me please feel free to reach out. I am going to end the recording now.

APPENDIX G Participant 3 Interview Transcript

Interviewer: Do I have your permission to start recording?

Participant 3: Okay.

Interviewer: Okay, can you share with me what grade you're in?

Participant 3: Eighth grade?

Interviewer: Perfect. And what is your favorite subject in school and why?

Participant 3: Um my favorite subject is math. I really like it because there's a certain type of future I wanna have, you know, you know, pass, you know, middle school and high school, high school, high school, high school down the line and you need to know math.

Interviewer: Okay, what type of future is that?

Participant 3: So I typically want to have a future with like, you know, business-type stuff. Have you ever heard of an entrepreneur? Like someone who takes their ideas and turns it into a business. That's something I really want to do because me and my mother have been talking about it and I really want to do because me and my mother been talking about it and I really wanted to do that but I haven't you know have fully developed the idea but my mother been talking about it and I really want to do that but I haven't you know have fully developed the idea of what I should do to make a business. That's why. And if that doesn't go well, then I am in football activities and I love football. So it depends if like, you know, if I put all my effort into it and you know, start to get like serious, like take it serious. Right now, it is like a 50/50 because I want to business and I want to do football and some other stuff.

Interviewer: Excellent. So you think that you need math. Math is your favorite subject, and you need it because you think it will help you to become an entrepreneur?

Participant 3: Yes, it's essential. Cause I'm gonna be mostly doing numbers, you know, calculating and all that type of stuff.

Interviewer: Excellent, awesome. Can you share with me how important you think school is?

Participant 3: Um School is really important. I say it's a, it's a number one priority because without school like most most of the things you have in life you wouldn't have without it like friends you know, your personality, how you develop, how you are as a person, like you're just developing throughout school and it really shows who are because you have all these people to talk to all these other other friends, you know, these teachers. You have your grades; you have all this type of work. You have all these set activities to

do and just show who you are as a person and really improve and like and see where you want to go.

Interviewer: Excellent. Thank you. Can you share with me what you envision yourself doing in the future? I know you shared a little bit about it in the previous question but share with me again what do you see yourself doing years and years later from now?

Participant 3: Probably after I you know get out of college because I am going to college because I do have one money to go to college that I will use probably I'll start to develop idea or you know work out with my mother to make an idea on something I wanna really work on and if I do go another path like you know as I said sports and football I'll really get serious into that and that depends if like you know you know how people get into a league and get you know you know like noticed by people so that's that's why I really want to do that. So that's what I really want to do. That's why I see myself like 5 years later. And if I don't go down those 2 paths. Probably I will get a job, but since the type of education I'm probably gonna take in college and high school and you know they see how my grades are and what type of education I have. I'll probably have a really good job that pays a lot of money. So I'll be stable, get house, you know, and do things.

Interviewer: So immediately graduating high school, what do you see yourself doing those first 5 years? Immediately.

Participant 3: Um, immediately after?

Interviewer: Yeah, so you graduate from high school. What's your 5-year plan? 5 year?

Participant 3: Probably, let me see, I'm trying to think. So immediately? Immediately?

Interviewer: So I know you said you want to either go into football or look for a job. Are you planning on going straight into college or you going to look for a job and do college?

Participant 3: No. Go to college first and then after college, I'll look for a job. That's what I'm gonna do.

Interviewer: Okay, perfect. Can you share with me what you find to be the most rewarding part of attending school?

Participant 3: Ummm, honestly, the most rewarding part is being able to do something. Cause our home, like, you know, you, it keeps you occupied so you're not bored and it's something that really matters to your life like it's really essential so that's that's you know the most rewarding part to it just get coming here, interacting with people, not being bored, doing things I really want to do and that's pretty much it.

Interviewer: Perfect, thank you. Can you share with me what advice you would give to an elementary age student about middle school?

Participant 3: Middle school? Oh, so the advice I would give them honestly, it's pretty simple. The advice I would give them just do your word, chill, don't overwhelm stuff, do whatever you have to do, do the second you get to do it or when you have free time so you could just relax chill back and then you could talk with your friends and maybe the teacher might be like hey stop talking or whatever but it's like you know you already did all your work and passing on classes so you really don't have to worry about done in the.

Interviewer: Okay, perfect. Can you share with me what aspects of school you like?

Participant 3: Aspects of school, definitely a bunch of the classes, but the most the main aspect of school is probably, probably the um, what is it? It's the sports activities, yeah, sports activities. The sports activities, I, I love that aspect only because I, you know, I get to play a sport after school. I get to do something I really want to do after school, and it shows like what what I want in the future school and it shows like what I what I want in the future. I just want I want to you know play something you know do an activity with my friends and mostly it's not even the reason that I joined just to be with my friends it's real it's something I'm passionate about something I just really want to do and see where I go if I actually take it serious.

Interviewer: Excellent. Thank you. I know you said before that maybe some of the classes are also, aspects of school you like, specifically what classes are you talking about and what is it that you like about them?

Participant 3: Definitely math because I told you, um, let me see what other classes. ELA. The reason why I love ELA so much is because it is it consists of a bunch of spelling, grammar, reading, and reading. I love reading like reading's probably one of my most favorite things is because as a child I didn't really had a phone or anything no device or whatever. I'll have consoles and stuff I'll play them meanwhile but mostly I'll just be reading and stuff and I develop to become amazing reader. So me just sitting there reading stuff. I understand it immediately and get through it really fast because I can just read, read, read, turn the page and then.

Interviewer: That's excellent. When you read it home, did read or when you were younger did you read with a parent and what did you read?

Participant 3: I read by myself and my mother or you know my parents or whatever they would have a bookshelf for a bunch of books they got from their childhood or they probably just bought and I would just read them and read them and read them and just become a better reader and they'll be books that I really enjoy reading so I'll just sit there on the couch reading the book books and then after I'm done with that book I would go to another book and it'll be really enjoying. And most of my time I'm spending is probably reading in a book going outside interacting with people and pretty much doing things that I really want to do.

Interviewer: That's awesome. It sounds like they're many things about school that you like. Can you share with me if there are any aspects of school that you don't like?

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Participant 3: No, there's no aspect to school I don't mind.

Interviewer: Okay, that's great.

Participant 3: Actually, nah ya there is nothing. I really like school because I just really like it. But honestly, I know a bunch of people say they hated or whatever, but it's like without school, they wanna be who they are right now cause a bunch of people say I hate school. I don't like it's boring, I'd rather stay home play games, but it's like they wouldn't have all the friends they had, depends it depended they met them outside school or in school but they really wouldn't have all this stuff and they wouldn't have an education so they you know where would to be put in front of a paper you know you know they had to take a test for the job they want to know nothing because they don't have any education.

Interviewer: So do you feel that education is important for your future?

Participant 3: Yes, it really is. Because without education, there's certain things you can't do, you're restricted to a lot of the things you can't make money you can't do this you can't do that and oh also it's just it's just important for for general use because if you don't have intelligence, you won't know nothing. Not, oh, you'll be bland, your personality will be bad. It's like it's really, it's really like mentally and physically. It develops you in both ways, I would say.

Interviewer: That's awesome. Thank you. Did mom or dad go to college?

Participant 3: My dad did go to college and my mother did didn't cause at the time I'm pretty sure she couldn't but she could but I'm not really sure. She explained the problem to me but I'm pretty sure she didn't but my dad did.

Interviewer: Do mom and dad work?

Participant 3: My father worked and my dad my mother is still working.

Interviewer: She's still working. What did dad do and what does mom do now?

Participant 3: They both worked at the airport. They both worked at the airline they would do some stuff I'm not specifically sure what they did but they made they made money off of it they did they were really smart they would have this have that, a lot of stuff, they were really smart.

Interviewer: So dad doesn't work anymore? Mom still works?

Participant: Yes, mom still works.

Interviewer: Okay, awesome. So I know we talked a bit about how you feel math is important for your future, can you shar with me if you feel science is important for your

future and how? Like how what you are learning in science now, how is that important for your future?

Participant 3: So, I feel like science is, I, I don't necessarily find it important and if I did, there wouldn't be any good reason because the only thing is science is more for like, you know, figuring out, you know, like how this animal functions, how much this um, wait I'm sorry. I can't even explain it. How this functions, how this works and whatever but honestly in the real world that wouldn't matter as much that's only if you're really you know dedicated to learn about that stuff and like scientists and stuff I feel like they put more time into that because it's really it's needed so people can learn about this stuff. And you know some type of knowledge on it so people can learn about this stuff, you know, some type of knowledge on it so they're not, you know, completely clueless on it and, you know, know it at all.

Interviewer: Excellent and can you share with me how you feel social studies, how what you are learning in social studies now, how it impacts your future.

Participant 3: Not at all.

Interviewer: Not at all?

Participant 3: It's just all history. It doesn't impact me as much. It's interesting to learn, it doesn't impact me as much.

Interviewer: Okay. And what about English?

Participant 3: English a lot because you know it's really just developing a bunch of my skill you know, spelling, grammar, pretty much everything besides, you know, some other skill skills that other classes develop.

Interviewer: Okay, beautiful. What makes successful people successful?

Participant 3: Honestly, what makes the people successful is really just having dedication to do something. No, dedication to just, you know, keep going, keep working, keep doing what they wanna do. And they they have this type of mindset that they want they wanna do this specific thing they wanna get somewhere like they don't wanna be like anybody else, they just want wanna relax sit down knowing they did a bunch of like not being a failure or whatever else you could. Well, whatever words they could be.

Interviewer: Okay, so what is a successful adult look like to you?

Participant 3: A successful adult. I would say successful adults to me is someone who is smart, has is stable, you know, had everything, everything organized, nice had things. You know, have things going for them, organized, to me. Like if you're if you're just staying at home not doing nothing you're playing on your phone, you're not doing much at home, you're not going outside, you're not interacting with people. You have no money.

I mean the money part doesn't really matter as much. I know it's still, you know, you know, get you around, but it's really how how you know, you know, other things are doing for you in life.

Interviewer: Perfect. And the last question, what do you think the reason is for going to school?

Participant 3: Honestly, Wait, I gotta think on this one. The reason for going to school?

Interviewer: Why do we have to go to school? What is the reason that you have to come here every day?

Participant 3: Honestly, Just, it's like a starting point. I'm not sure how to explain it, but I could like it's a starting point for you in life for you to just develop. Develop. Yeah, honestly, I kept saying that over and over, but it's really just a starting point, but to see where would you go off from this point and after.

Interviewer: Okay, perfect. That's the end of our interview before I end the recording. Do you have anything else that you would like to share with me about your perception of education's ability to impact your future?

Participant 3: No.

Interviewer: Okay, so I want to thank you again for your time and for allowing me to interview you. And the recording now.

Interviewer: Okay, can you share with me what grade you're in?

Participant 4: Oh, I'm in eighth grade.

Interviewer: Perfect. And can you share with me what your favorite subject is in school and why?

Participant 4: Probably social studies. I like learning about like the history of our country. I find it like very interesting. It's more like it's less dull it's more like interesting, especially like wars and things. That's what I find very fascinating.

Interviewer: Awesome, excellent. And can you share with me how important school is to you?

Participant 4: I find it important because I want to like to earn a degree to help my parents out because my father is getting very old. So, like the importance of school is so that I can like keep my brain like what's the word for it? Like exercise every day.

Interviewer: Okay, excellent. Can you share with me what you mean by when you say help your dad out or help your parents out? What do you mean by that?

Participant 4: Like I wanna like work hard at school so I could get into college and get a degree.

Interviewer: Okay, excellent. And out of curiosity, how old are your parents?

Participant 4: Like I think my dad's like, 45ish maybe.

Interviewer: Okay, excellent. Can you share with me what you envision yourself doing in the future.

Participant 4: I'm not very sure about that, but I imagine like, like doing a small job, so I can make enough money to like maybe like get into like a better school.

Interviewer: Okay, what kind of small job?

Participant 4: Maybe like working as like a cashier of some sort.

Interviewer: So that you can make money to do what with that money?

Participant 4: That's the part that's the part I'm not sure about yet. I'm gonna like go over that with my brother in the future.

Interviewer: Excellent. So you said you want to make money so that you can use it to help you get into a better school? Do you mean college?

Participant 4: Uh, actually when I get the money, that's what I'm gonna like decide what to do with it but for now, I'm just gonna like, I'm gonna work hard to even get there in the first place.

Interviewer: Okay, perfect. Thank you. And can you share with me what your five-year plan is post high school. So after you finish high school, what do you see yourself doing in the first 5 years after?

Participant 4: Uh, I can imagine myself like wondering, like, what job should I get like before I go to high school because, I'm gonna be like all focused about like college stuff and I need to like think about my future before it's too late.

Interviewer: So right after you graduate high school, are you planning on getting a job right away? Are you planning on going to college? Like right, let's say you graduate high school in June, what's your plan for the following September?

Participant 4: I'm gonna go to college and then get a job, but I'm not sure what I'm gonna right after high school immediately.

Interviewer: So, okay, excellent. Can you please share what you find to be the most rewarding part of attending school?

Participant 4: Oh, the best part of attending school uh not getting my parents angry for missing the bus. Going to school I feel proud when I get like a really good grade, especially on tests.

Interviewer: Excellent. Can you share with me what advice you would give to an elementary age student about middle school?

Participant 4: I would, one piece of advice I'd definitely give them is like, focus in the classes or they are not going to remember anything like during the homework.

Interviewer: Awesome. Thank you. Can you share what aspects of school that you like?

Participant 4: I guess recess. That's one of them cause I get to like hang out and talk to friends.
Uh, probably like clubs too. I'm thinking, I'm actually thinking of like joining football today.

Interviewer: Oh, that's great. Awesome. Okay, and can you share with me any aspects of school that you don't like?

Participant 4: One aspect I probably don't like would maybe, homework I guess.

Interviewer: Okay, why don't you like homework?

Participant 4: Oh, because when I get home, I wanna have like time to myself.

Interviewer: Okay, is there any homework that you don't mind doing or you just don't like any homework?

Participant 4: Mostly Spanish because I'm not, I don't do very good in Spanish actually.

Interviewer: Is Spanish important to you?

Partipcant 4: I do find it important, that's why I'm trying my best.

Interviewer: Okay, excellent. Can you share with me what extent you can describe the relationship you have with your peers?

Participant 4: With my?

Interviewer: With your friends.

Participant 4: Oh my friends, my friends. I do have a good relationship with them. We, I usually just play, during like lunch, would all talk and like have fun and during recess they're actually the reason why I'm joining football today right now actually.

Interviewer: Excellent. Are your friends in any of your classes?

Participant 4: Most of them are not in my classes.

Interviewer: Okay. Well, do you take any honors classes or no?

Participant 4: I don't.

Interviewer: Are your friends in honors classes or they just in different classes than you're in?

Participant 4: They're all different classes but I don't think but I'm not sure if they're in honors classes.

Interviewer: Okay, but, so you don't have classes with them so you just get to see them during recess?

Participant 4: You know, most of the time. I'm, most of my friends, I do have a few friends that are in my classes, most of them that I know aren't in my classes.

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Interviewer: And can you share with me about your relationships with the teachers in school?

Participant 4: My first period teacher. Actually, first period is my specials, so I have different teachers. My second period teacher his name is Mr. ****, I think. We, he's just, I don't really have a relationship with him. He's pretty much just there. He's pretty much just my teacher.
Interviewer: Okay.

Participant 4: My third period, Ms. ***** Uh, I mean, I guess we have a good relationship, but just like my second period teacher, we don't talk.

Interviewer: Okay.

Participant 4: Although I do have a good relationship with my fourth period teacher, he's very energetic.

Interviewer: Who is that?

Participant 4: Mr. *****,

Interviewer: Mr. *****?

Participant 4: Yeah, the social studies teacher.

Interviewer: And what makes you feel like you have a good relationship with him?

Participant 4: Oh, it's not that we talk just that he, gives up, because he gives up like good vibes and he's always like happy.

Interviewer: Okay, do you feel comfortable going to him if you have a question about something?

Participant 4: Oh, probably. But if anything, I'd only say it after class.

Interviewer: Why?

Participant 4: To avoid embarrassment.

Interviewer: So you'd be afraid to ask a question in class because you don't want to be embarrassed?

Participant 4: Yeah.

Interviewer: And that same way that you would feel comfortable talking to him after class would you feel comfortable speaking to Ms. ***** or Mr. *****?

Participant 4: Um, I would, but it really depends on the situation.

Interviewer: Okay. Excellent. Can you share with me how you feel what you're learning in math impacts your future?
Participant 4: Um, most of the things in math that I thought would help me in the future I already forgot. Math is not helping me like in the future, which I believe, but it is like keeping my brain like running every day.

Interviewer: Okay, so you don't see any connection with what you're learning in math now to your future outside of school?

Participant 4: Uh, if anything, it affects like me right now, like making sure that I'm, I'm not just playing games, I'm actually like thinking like every day.

Interviewer: Okay, excellent. And how do you think what you're learning in science impacts your future?

Participant 4: I don't think it'll help me in the future, but I can find the fun at least.

Interviewer: Okay. And how about social studies? How do you think what you're learning in social studies impacts your future?

Participant 4: Uh, if it's like basic history, like, you know, like the senators or like the governors of New York. I think that it would help me in the future. It's basic stuff that a person should know. But things like in the past, most people, you like when you do like a job interview the first thing is not for them to ask you "Oh, who were inside the World War One? They don't actually ask that sort of stuff.

Interviewer: So you think that some of the information you learn is important for an interview when you go on a job?

Participant 4: I don't think it's important for now. I think it's just basic knowledge you should know.

Interviewer: Is anything that you're learning in school important for when you go in an interview for a job?

Participant 4: Maybe Spanish. I guess, math like they might ask you to like, uh I think math will just help me in the future but I am not sure if it has anything to do with a job interview.

Interviewer: Okay. And how do you think English is impacting your future?

Participant 4: It's helping me with writing.

Interviewer: Okay, and what do you need writing for?

Participant 4: Grammar, punctuation like, like hard vocabulary because if you're inside an interview, you want to like use like, you know, big words.

Interviewer: Okay, excellent. Can you share with me what makes successful person successful?

Participant 4: Uh, they need to be like hard working. If they're always just like laying down all day doing nothing then I wouldn't like, maybe they would be successful, but they wouldn't be considered hard working.

Interviewer: Okay. When you think about somebody who's successful, how would you describe that person?

Participant 4: I would, if I were to like have images inside my head, every day they would be working their hardest, like doing big jobs. they'd be like working their hardest like take doing big jobs. Like spending time with their family, not just like always like working, like spending time with people that they love, like their friends, especially their family.

Interviewer: So balance. So having a job and being able to spend time with family?

Participant 4: And having good money at least.

Interviewer: Okay. What do you consider to be like a good job?

Participant 4: I guess like tax, like doing taxes, real estate. A job, job that's good for starting out would probably be something small like a cashier, that's what I am going to start with.

Interviewer: Okay, excellent. And lastly, what do you think the reason is for going to school?

Participant 4: I think the reason is so that it could prepare you a little bit for the future. But most of it, most of the things that you need to learn for the future, you will learn like during life or from your parents.

Interviewer: Okay, excellent. Can you share with me like if you think, so you say like you learn the things from your parents that you need for the future? Can you give me an example about something that you feel that you learned from your parents?

Participant 4: I learned to like focus and like really and not to like fall under pressure in school like. If you make a mistake, it's okay, but in the future, if you make a mistake, it might be over for you.

Interviewer: Okay, do your parents work?

Participant 4: My mother is a stay-at-home mother, of course. And my dad, my dad is the one who brings home the dough.

Interviewer: And what does your dad do?

Participant 4: He does taxes.

Interviewer: Okay. Is he, what's his exact title? Do you know?

Participant 4: Oh, not really, but I know he has something to do with taxes like registering. Is that what it is called? I'm not sure.

Interview: Okay, excellent. So that concludes our interview for today before I end the recording. Do you have anything else that you would like to share with me about education's ability to impact your future.

Participant 4: No, I don't think so.

Interviewer: Okay. Thank you again for your time and for allowing me to interview you. Please reach out to me if you have any questions and I'm gonna end the recording right now. Okay.

APPENDIX I Interview 5 Participant Transcript

Interviewer: Okay. I am going to record. Okay. Alright, so to start, can you share with me what grade you are in?

Participant 5: I'm in, I mean, I'm eighth grade.

Interviewer: Excellent. And what's your favorite subject in school and why?

Participant 5: I think my favorite subject is social studies. Why? Because I just like, I like learning about history.

Interviewer: Okay, perfect. Thank you. And can you share with me how important school is to you?

Participant 5: Um, I'd say school is very important for me because if I if I do really good and try hard at school, then it can help me get into a good college and it'll be useful for like job interviews and stuff.

Interviewer: Excellent, thank you. Can you share with me what you envision yourself doing in the future?

Participant 5: Um (long pause) I don't really know what I wanted to do.

Interviewer: Okay, and what about a 5-year plan after school? So like once you graduate high school, what do you see your 5 year plan being?

Participant 5: I'd say maybe get into get into a college that I wanna go to and just take it from there maybe have a job on the side to get some money.

Interviewer: Okay excellent. Do you know what school you want to go to where you're not sure yet?

Participant 5: Not yet, yeah, maybe something with a good art program.

Interviewer: Okay, excellent. And do you know what kind of job you would want to work while you're going to school?

Participant 5: Maybe character design. I like drawing people so.

Interviewer: Okay, awesome. Thank you. Can you share with me what you find to be the most rewarding part of attending school?

Participant 5: The most rewarding part? like attending school or just like just showing up or like getting good grades, or both?

Interviewer: I guess both.

Participant 5: Well, for both, I say for like attendance, showing up every day. If you do show up every day and stuff it gives you a higher chance to get student of the month and stuff. If you try hard you can get student in the month and you can get put in honors classes if you get really good grades, so I like that.

Interviewer: Okay, excellent. Thank you. Can you share what advice you would give to an elementary age student about middle school?

Participant 5: Um, an advice I give is pick, is like stay close to people who you know are gonna let you up and don't associate yourself with people who are just gonna bring you down. That involves stuff like cursing, drugs, and anything anything that isn't viewed as like good student behavior.

Interviewer: Excellent, great answer. Thank you. Can you share with me what aspects of school you like?

Participant 5: Aspect of school I like, Uh, I'd say maybe a bunch of the after school stuff they have here like there's there's drama, there's dance, there's music, there's sports. I just like I like that you have a variety of stuff.

Interviewer: Do you participate in those things?

Participant 5: Um, I'm in drama and I do to social studies club.

Interviewer: Very nice, thank you! Can you share with if there are any aspects of school that you do not like?

Participant 5: The aspects of school I don't like is, ah, maybe, punishment or like, for like people like kids who have transgressions. Like if a kid is rude most of the time, they don't get in trouble or anything. If they are really rude, maybe like a detention.

Interviewer: So you think that they should get in trouble for those things?

Participant 5: Mhm.

Interviewer: Okay, excellent. Can you share with me to what extent you can describe the relationship you have with your peers in school?

Participant 5: The relationship I have. Um, I have friends, but I don't really talk to other people unless it's like what's the time or what is the homework.

Interviewer: Okay. So you don't have, like a close group of friends in school or you do?

Participant 5: I do.

Interviewer: Okay. And can you share with me the relationship you have with your teachers in school.

Participant 5: With my teachers. I'm nice to them. They are nice to me. Sometimes maybe I find one or two of them annoying but there's no like bad blood or anything.

Interviewer: Okay, excellent. And can you share with me how you view what you're learning in math right now, how it impacts your future learning in math right now, how it impacts your future.

Participant 5: What we're learning in math right now. I'd say if you were pretty bad at math it wouldn't impact your future that much because there's plenty of jobs that don't really circle around that.

Interviewer: Okay, and do you feel that way you're learning in math right now impacts your future at all?

Participant 5: I'd say it helps, it helps, but other than that it doesn't really.

Interviewer: Okay, and what about with science? Do you feel that what you're learning in science impacts your future at all?

Participant 5: I think it does because we're learning like a high school class. So it, I think all of them are high school class or whatever, it's like pushing us forward so that maybe someone will want to become a scientist maybe someone will cure cancer, just gives us more opportunities.

Interviewer: Okay, excellent. And what about in social studies? How do you feel what you learning in social studies now will impact your future?

Participant 5: I would say for the future there's not really, I can't really name like 3 social studies-based jobs, but it just gives us a better knowledge and understanding of what like this what the world has been through. Cause like, you know, if those who don't remember the mistakes tend to repeat it.

Interviewer: Good, beautiful. And, ELA, how do you feel what you're learning in ELA impacts your future?

Participant 5: Again, it also, it also gives us a push like the more, knowledge we have on like how to read, how to write. Maybe some of us will become publishers like it could be in the news, writing books, maybe some of us will use like advanced vocabulary that we learn to become like people who write papers and who write speeches.

Interviewer: Okay, perfect. And can you share with me what you feel makes a successful person successful?

Participant 5: I'd say maybe integrity, and courage, just you know, the will to keep going forward.

Interviewer: Okay, and if you think of an adult being successful, what does that look like to you?

Participant 5: I'd say also integrity, but they also have like, ingenuity and the ability to like to think outside of the box.

Interviewer: Beautiful. And the last question, what do you think the reason for going to school is?

Participant 5: For going to school. To help us get a better life. To give us a push that that like people coming into America don't usually don't normally always get like education.

Interviewer: I actually have a follow up question. Who do you live with at home?

Participant 5: I live with my 2 grandmothers and my mom, my dad, my sister.

Interviewer: Okay, and do mom and dad work?

Participant 5: My dad, I think he's working. It's he does something with HVACs. He's like a handy man. And then my mom is a nurse, she works in hospital.

Interviewer: Okay, beautiful. Did they both go to college or no?

Participant 5: I think my mom did my dad though in this country or in another country. My mom in this country, my dad only got like an education where he's from.

Interviewer: Okay, beautiful. Do you have any questions for me before we conclude the interview?

Participant 5: Okay, thank you very much.

APPENDIX J District Letter to Parents/Guardians

UNION-FREE SCHOOL DISTRICT

Superintendent of Schools

Assistant Superintendent
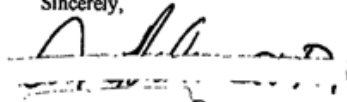Business & Operations

August 2023

Dear Parent or Guardian,

We are asking that **all parents/guardians of** ⸻ **students complete** the attached **CEP Household Income Eligibility Form and return as soon as possible.** This information helps Lawrence UFSD to continue to obtain certain federal funds and state grants that enhance student programs for the district. In addition, there are **benefits** that your children may qualify for such as **discounted ACT/SAT test fees** and other extracurricular programs **(SCOPE).**

1. Sign the "Consent to Release Form."
2. Complete and sign The Community Eligibility Form.
3. Return both forms to the ⸻ Business Office, or scan/take a picture and email to nutrition@ ⸻

If you need assistance, please contact your school's social worker. This information will be kept strictly confidential.

Thank you for your cooperation and help in getting our students all the services that they are entitled to!

Sincerely,

⸻, ⸻.D.
Superintendent

District Offices

APPENDIX K Community Eligibility Provision (CEP)

Community Eligibility Provision (CEP)/Provision 2 non-base year
Household Income Eligibility Form

Lawrence Public Schools (name/school) is participating in the Community Eligibility Provision (CEP) or Provision 2 in a non-base year. All children in the school will receive meals/milk at no charge regardless of household income or completion of this form. This form is to determine eligibility for additional State and federal program benefits that your child(ren) may qualify for. Read the instructions on the back, complete only one form for your household, sign your name and return it to the school named above. Call _the school social worker_ (school phone number), if you need help.

1. List all children in your household who attend school.

Student Name	School	Grade/Teacher	Foster Child	No Income
			☐	☐
			☐	☐
			☐	☐
			☐	☐
			☐	☐
			☐	☐

2. SNAP/TANF/FDPIR Benefits:
If anyone in your household receives either SNAP, TANF or FDPIR benefits, list their name and CASE # here. Then skip to Part 4.

Name: _____   CASE # _____

3. Household Gross Income: List all people living in your household, how much and how often they are paid (weekly, every other week, twice per month, monthly). Do not leave income blank. If no income, check box. If you have listed a foster child above, you must report their personal income.

Name of household member	Earnings from work before deductions Amount / How Often	Child Support, Alimony Amount / How Often	Pensions, Retirement Payments Amount / How Often	Other Income, Social Security Amount / How Often	No Income
	$_____ / _____	$_____ / _____	$_____ / _____	$_____ / _____	☐
	$_____ / _____	$_____ / _____	$_____ / _____	$_____ / _____	☐
	$_____ / _____	$_____ / _____	$_____ / _____	$_____ / _____	☐
	$_____ / _____	$_____ / _____	$_____ / _____	$_____ / _____	☐
	$_____ / _____	$_____ / _____	$_____ / _____	$_____ / _____	☐
	$_____ / _____	$_____ / _____	$_____ / _____	$_____ / _____	☐
	$_____ / _____	$_____ / _____	$_____ / _____	$_____ / _____	☐
	$_____ / _____	$_____ / _____	$_____ / _____	$_____ / _____	☐

4. Signature: An adult household member must sign this application.

I certify (promise) that all the information on this application is true and that all income is reported. I understand that the information is being given so the school may receive federal funds. The school officials may verify the information and if I purposely give false information, I may be prosecuted under applicable State and federal laws, and my children may lose meal benefits.

Signature: _____   Date: _____

Email Address: _____

Home Phone: _____

Work Phone: _____

Home Address: _____

DO NOT WRITE BELOW THIS LINE – FOR SCHOOL USE ONLY

Annual Income Conversion (Only convert when multiple income frequencies are reported on application)
Weekly X 52; Every Two Weeks (bi-weekly) X 26; Twice Per Month X 24; Monthly X 12

SNAP/TANF/Foster

Income _____   Total Household Income/How Often: _____   Household Size: _____

Free Eligibility _____   Reduced Eligibility _____   Denied Eligibility _____
Signature of Reviewing Official

APPENDIX L Consent to Release Household Income Eligibility Form

CONSENT TO RELEASE HOUSEHOLD INCOME ELIGIBILITY INFORMATION
UFSD 2023-2024

School officials may release information that shows that my child/children may be eligible for the following programs. I understand that the information will only be provided to the program(s) checked.

Check the box next to the program area(s) you wish to release information to

○ Federal health programs such as Medicaid or Children's Health Insurance Program (CHIP).
○ State or federal programs such as the Youth Summer Work program or the Educational Talent Search Program.
○ Local health and education programs and other local programs provide benefits such as free textbooks or school supplies, free band instruments, or reduced fees for summer school or driver education.
○ Community programs such as holiday baskets, summer arts and playground programs.

I understand that I will be releasing information that will show that my child/children based on the Household Income Eligibility Form. I give consent to release my confidential information for the above named uses.

Child/Children:

_____

_____

_____

_____

I certify that I am the child's parent/guardian for whom the application was made.

Signature of Parent/Guardian: _____

Print Name: _____

Address: _____

Phone Number: _____

Date: _____

Nondiscrimination Statement:

In accordance with Federal civil rights law and U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) civil rights regulations and policies, the USDA, its Agencies, offices, and employees, and institutions participating in or administering USDA programs are prohibited from discriminating based on race, color, national origin, sex, disability, age, or reprisal or retaliation for prior civil rights activity in any program or activity conducted or funded by USDA.

Persons with disabilities who require alternative means of communication for program information (e.g. Braille, large print audiotape, American Sign Language, etc.), should contact the Agency (State or local) where they applied for benefits. Individuals who are deaf, hard of hearing or have speech disabilities may contact USDA through the Federal Relay Service at (800) 877- 8339. Additionally, program information may be made available in languages other than English.

To file a program complaint of discrimination, complete the USDA Program Discrimination Complaint Form, (AD-3027) found online at: https://www.usda.gov/oascr/how-to-file-a-program-discrimination-complaint and at any USDA office, or write a letter addressed to USDA and provide in the letter all of the information requested in the form. To request a copy of the complaint form, call (866) 632-9992. Submit your completed form or letter to USDA by:

(1) mail: U.S. Department of Agriculture
Office of the Assistant Secretary for Civil Rights
1400 Independence Avenue, SW
Washington, D.C. 20250-9410;
(2) fax: (202) 690-7442; or
(3) email: program.intake@usda.gov

This institution is an equal opportunity provider.

APPENDIX M Annual Release Public Announcement

ANNUAL NEWS RELEASE - PUBLIC ANNOUNCEMENT

_____(Local School Food Authority) today announced a free and reduced price meal (Free Milk) policy for _____ area school children. Local school officials have adopted the following family eligibility criteria to assist them in determining eligibility:

2023-2024 INCOME ELIGIBILITY GUIDELINES
FOR FREE AND REDUCED PRICE MEALS OR FREE MILK

| Free Eligibility Scale | | | | | Reduced Price Eligibility Scale* | | | | | |
| Free Lunch, Breakfast, Milk | | | | | Reduced Price Lunch, Breakfast | | | | | |
Household Size	Annual	Monthly	Twice per Month	Every Two Weeks	Weekly	Household Size	Annual	Monthly	Twice per Month	Every Two Weeks	Weekly
1	$18,954	$1,580	$790	$729	$365	1	$26,973	$2,248	$1,124	$1,038	$519
2	$25,636	$2,137	$1,069	$986	$493	2	$36,482	$3,041	$1,521	$1,404	$702
3	$32,318	$2,694	$1,347	$1,243	$622	3	$45,991	$3,833	$1,917	$1,769	$885
4	$39,000	$3,250	$1,625	$1,500	$750	4	$55,500	$4,625	$2,313	$2,135	$1,068
5	$45,682	$3,807	$1,904	$1,757	$879	5	$65,009	$5,418	$2,709	$2,501	$1,251
6	$52,364	$4,364	$2,182	$2,014	$1,007	6	$74,518	$6,210	$3,105	$2,867	$1,434
7	$59,046	$4,921	$2,461	$2,271	$1,136	7	$84,027	$7,003	$3,502	$3,232	$1,616
8	$65,728	$5,478	$2,739	$2,528	$1,264	8	$93,536	$7,795	$3,898	$3,598	$1,799
Each Add'l person, add	$6,682	$557	$279	$257	$129	Each Add'l person, add	$9,509	$793	$397	$366	$183

*Students in New York State that are approved for reduced price meals will receive breakfast and lunch meals and snacks served through the Afterschool Snack Program at no charge.

SNAP/TANF/FDPIR Households: Households that currently include children who receive the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) but who are not found during the Direct Certification Matching Process (DCMP), or households that currently receive Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF), or the Food Distribution Program on Indian Reservations (FDPIR) must complete an Application for Free and Reduced Price School Meals/Milk, listing the child's name, a valid SNAP, TANF, or FDPIR case number and the signature of an adult household member. Eligibility for free meal benefits based on participation in SNAP, TANF or FDPIR is extended to all children in the household. When known to the School Food Authority, households will be notified of their children's eligibility for free meals based on their participation in the SNAP, TANF or the FDPIR programs. No application is necessary if the household was notified by the SFA their children have been directly certified. If the household is not sure if their children have been directly certified, the household should contact the school.

Other Source Categorical Eligibility: When known to the School Food Authority, households will be notified of any child's eligibility for free meals based on the individual child's designation as Other Source Categorically Eligible, as defined by law. Children are determined Other Source Categorically Eligible if they are Homeless, Migrant, Runaway, a foster child, or Enrolled in Head Start or an eligible pre-kindergarten program.

Foster children that are under the legal responsibility of a foster care agency or court, are eligible for free meals. Any foster child in the household is eligible for free meals regardless of income. A separate application for a foster child is no longer necessary. Foster children may also be included as a member of the foster family if the foster family chooses to also apply for benefits for other children. Including children in foster care as household members may help other children in the household qualify for benefits. If non-foster children in a foster family are not eligible for free or reduced price meal benefits, an eligible foster child will still receive free benefits

If children or households receive benefits under Assistance Programs or Other Source Categorically Eligible Programs and are not listed on the notice of eligibility and are not notified by the School Food Authority of their free meal benefits, the parent or guardian should contact the school or should submit an income application.

Other Households: Households with income the same or below the amounts listed above for family size may be eligible for and are urged to apply for free and/or reduced price meals (or free milk). They may do so by completing the Application for Free and Reduced Price School Meals/Milk sent home with the letter to parents. One application for all children in the household should be submitted. Additional copies are available at the principal's office in each school.

1

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