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CREATING A CULTURE OF COLLEGE AND CAREER READINESS:
STRATEGIES AND INTERVENTIONS FOR AFRICAN-AMERICAN STUDENTS

A Dissertation
Presented to
the Graduate School of
Clemson University

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Doctor of Education
Education Systems Improvement Science

by
James R. Ford
August 2024

Accepted by:
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ABSTRACT

The persistent underrepresentation of African American students in college and career ready graduates presents a significant challenge within U.S. educational systems. This study investigates targeted strategies to increase the percentage of African American students graduating from high school college or career ready per South Carolina standards. The research was conducted in a rural school district known for its diverse student body and significant disparities in educational outcomes. The study's primary objective was to identify and implement educational interventions that enhance college and career readiness (CCR) specifically for African American students, thereby aiming to bridge the gap in readiness and contribute to educational equity. Using a mixed-methods approach that combined qualitative and quantitative data collecting, the study assessed the efficacy of various readiness-boosting interventions. Some of these measures included the introduction of thorough requirements for college and career readiness, heightened parental involvement, chances for experiential learning, and culturally sensitive instruction. Student performance metrics and surveys of both students and teachers were used to gather data. The results show that implementing CCR standards early improves students' readiness considerably by helping them acquire important life and academic skills. The study also discovered that parental involvement is essential for assisting students in their academic endeavors, especially when it comes to creating a culture that values education. It has been demonstrated that experiential learning successfully connects academic theories to practical applications, improving students' engagement and comprehension of their potential career prospects. Furthermore, the

integration of students' cultural identities into their learning experiences was made possible by culturally responsive teaching approaches, which improved student engagement and academic performance.

DEDICATION

"For I know the plans I have for you, declares the Lord, plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future." - Jeremiah 29:11

To my precious daughter Skylar, whose joy and presence inspire me every day to go higher and become the best version of myself. You bring me the most joy and inspiration. I dedicate this dissertation to you since I aim to be the best at all I do because of you. Your curiosity, laughs, and unshakable faith in me have motivated me in all I have attempted. This educational endeavor is a monument to my hopes for your future, the limitless opportunities that await you, and my steadfast dedication to helping you achieve all of your goals. May this accomplishment act as a springboard for your future endeavors, a reminder of my unending love for you, and a lesson of the value of tenacity.

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My amazing family, whose steadfast support has been the cornerstone of my journey, has my sincere gratitude. Your everlasting love, insight, and support have helped me overcome every obstacle, and your passionate belief in me has strengthened my will to keep going. Every one of you has been crucial in determining my course, and I am incredibly appreciative of all of the group and individual influences that have helped me succeed.

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

As the education system evolves, the stakes for providing our children with a strong foundation have never been higher. Children today face a rapidly changing world and we must prepare them for the future. From the moment they first use a table to pull themselves up to their graduation day, they depend on our school districts and states to provide them with the tools they need to thrive. As educators, it is our responsibility to ensure that our students are equipped with the knowledge and skills necessary to succeed. However, with the ongoing transformation in educational curricula worldwide, it is becoming increasingly imperative to offer students meaningful and valuable tasks. According to the National Research Council (2012), engaging students in deeper learning and providing them with tasks that require critical thinking, complex problem-solving, and effective communication are crucial for their success in the 21st-century workforce. Furthermore, a study by the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD, 2019) highlighted the importance of real-world problem-solving tasks in fostering skills that students will need in their future careers.

This emphasis on meaningful tasks is not merely for academic proficiency but to better prepare students for a rapidly evolving global economy. The problem of practice in this study is that many African American students graduate high school without being adequately prepared for college or a career. In the 2020-2021 school year in the Skyville School District (a pseudonym for privacy), while the graduation rate for African American students was 89.7%, only 57.7% were deemed ready for college or a career,

highlighting a concerning discrepancy in their post-secondary preparedness (SCDE, 2022).

Since children use a table to pull themselves up, they start learning various essential skills that prepare them for high school graduation and beyond. It is critical to note that their success later in life relies heavily on the quality of education they receive from school districts and states. According to Conley (2012), providing children with a strong foundation and consistent growth opportunities is essential for their future success. Our schools' curricula have changed as educators seek new and better ways to empower their students. As highlighted by Johnson and Johnson (2007), most educators agree that providing students with worthwhile tasks is essential to help them construct their understanding of the future. By exploring, discussing, discovering, writing about, practicing, and applying concepts, students can gain the knowledge and skills necessary to thrive beyond high school.

Moreover, the discrepancy between the high school graduation rate and college or career readiness of African American students is an issue that needs to be addressed. Although the high graduation rate is commendable, it is crucial to ensure that students are well-prepared for the demands of college or a career. This is particularly important for African American students in rural South Carolina, who face unique challenges such as limited access to resources, lower academic achievement, and systemic obstacles. However, SC results show that graduating from high school only sometimes translates to being college or career ready. As per the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP, 2019) report, only 17% of African American high school seniors scored

proficient or higher in math and reading, while the College Board's (2022) report showed that only a minute fraction of African American students who took the Scholastic Assessment Test (SAT) in 2020 met the College Board's College and Career Readiness Benchmark, indicating their ability to succeed in college-level coursework.

Over the past few years, there has been a commendable increase in African American students' high school graduation rates. This progress is the result of efforts made by educational institutions, communities, and policymakers to bridge the academic achievement gap. However, a more profound and concerning disparity remains. According to the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES, 2021), while more African American students are completing high school, many are not adequately prepared for the next phase of their academic or professional journey. This lack of preparedness is evident in both college enrollment and retention rates and the challenges faced by those entering the workforce directly after high school. Factors contributing to this readiness gap include inadequate access to advanced coursework, limited resources in schools predominantly attended by African American students, and systemic disparities beyond the school environment. Recent data underscore this troubling divide, emphasizing the need to ensure students graduate and equip them with the essential skills and knowledge they will need in college or their chosen careers.

The rise in high school graduation rates in the Skyville School District and statewide is undoubtedly commendable. However, a concerning disparity emerges when examining college and career readiness. In the district, African American students represented 45% of the 2021 graduating class, yet less than 50% graduated with the

necessary college or career skills. This is a significant disparity compared to the 87% readiness rate among White students, as reported by the South Carolina Department of Education (SCDE, 2022). In a broader context, South Carolina's overall statistics show that about 72% of its high school graduates were college or career ready in 2021. The underlying systemic issues, limited resources, and varying academic achievements present unique challenges for these students that need addressing.

A comprehensive analysis of data from the district, state, and national levels reveals worrying implications for the future of many African American students within our educational system. Despite a noted improvement in high school graduation rates, there remains a pressing concern: many of these students are not adequately equipped for the rigors they will encounter in college or the professional realm. This points to the idea that merely ensuring graduation is insufficient; the depth and breadth of their education and the skills they develop are of utmost importance.

Several factors underpin this disparity. For one, African American students in predominantly African American schools might not consistently have access to advanced coursework or top-tier instructional resources. Additionally, socioeconomic hurdles, which include financial challenges and a restricted view of potential career paths, can deter a student's preparedness for further education or employment. Moreover, entrenched systemic challenges, such as biases within classroom dynamics and the lackluster funding of schools in deprived areas, intensify the discrepancies.

Addressing this glaring gap requires a multi-faceted approach. There is an urgent need for targeted interventions, such as supplementary educational programs, mentorship

opportunities, and access to counseling that can guide college and career paths.

Moreover, it is crucial to examine the root causes, whether systemic, socioeconomic, or curriculum-based, and craft solutions that directly address and rectify these foundational issues.

Addressing the educational disparity among African American students requires comprehensive strategies across multiple fronts. To narrow the gap, there must be a collective effort to provide equal opportunities for quality education, financial support, mentorship, and role models while addressing systemic issues such as discrimination and insufficient funding in African American communities that impact educational outcomes for this group. According to the NCES (2021), the enrollment rate for postsecondary institutions in 2018 was 76 percent for White, non-Hispanic 18- to 24-year-olds, while it was only 59 percent for Black, non-Hispanic 18- to 24-year-olds.

Ensuring that students are equipped for postsecondary education is a multifaceted endeavor. According to Conley (2012), college readiness refers to a student's preparedness to participate in and complete entry-level, credit-bearing academic programs at both two- and four-year postsecondary institutions. This preparedness is not limited to merely absorbing course material but encompasses a holistic range of competencies. Students must have the foundational knowledge and the capability to integrate and apply this knowledge using critical thinking and problem-solving skills. Furthermore, as highlighted by Wyatt & Wiley (2017), college readiness also includes a student's ability to adapt to the new social and emotional environments of college life, manage their time effectively, and leverage available resources to achieve academic

success. Preparing students to navigate the intricacies of postsecondary pathways, from choosing suitable courses to understanding transfer protocols, is equally vital in ensuring they can fully capitalize on their educational opportunities.

Similarly, career readiness necessitates acquiring core academic skills and using those skills effectively in real-world settings, including the workplace and everyday activities. As noted by the National Association of Colleges and Employers (NACE, 2019) in its Career Readiness Competencies Report, critical thinking/problem-solving, oral/written communication, teamwork/collaboration, digital technology, leadership, professionalism/work ethic, and career management are the seven critical competencies required for career readiness. They include critical thinking and responsibility, essential in every career field, and specialized, job-specific skills relevant to a particular career pathway (Conley, 2012).

The South Carolina Department of Education states that students must fulfill specific criteria reflecting their academic preparedness to be deemed college or career ready. College readiness includes achieving a composite score of 20 or higher on the ACT, securing a composite score of 1020 or higher on the SAT, attaining a score of 3 or higher on an Advanced Placement (AP) exam, or earning a score of 4 or higher on an International Baccalaureate (IB) assessment, with only higher-level exams considered. Additionally, students can satisfy this standard by completing a minimum of six (6) credit hours in dual enrollment courses with a grade of C or higher, indicating their ability to handle college-level coursework while still in high school.


On the other hand, achieving career ready status entails meeting various benchmarks demonstrating readiness for the workforce. This may involve completing a comprehensive Career and Technical Education (CTE) program and obtaining a nationally or state-recognized industry credential endorsed by prominent figures in the business community. Alternatively, students can demonstrate career readiness by earning a Silver, Gold, or Platinum National Career Readiness Certificate through assessments such as the WorkKeys exam or a similar credential through the WIN Ready to Work Career Assessment. Additionally, achieving a scale score of 31 or higher on the ASVAB is indicative of career readiness. See Figure 1.1.

Figure 1.1

South Carolina Standards for College and Career Readiness

To be college-ready, a student must meet one of the following:

1. Scores a composite score of 20 or higher on the ACT;
2. Scores a composite score of 1020 or higher on the SAT;
3. Scores a 3 or higher on an Advanced Placement (AP) exam;
4. Scores a 4 or higher on an International Baccalaureate (IB) assessment Only higher learning (HL) exams may count; or
5. Completes at least six (6) credit hours in dual enrollment courses with a grade of C or higher.



The infographic titled "PROFILE OF THE South Carolina Graduate" is divided into three main sections: "WORLD-CLASS KNOWLEDGE", "WORLD-CLASS SKILLS", and "LIFE AND CAREER CHARACTERISTICS". "WORLD-CLASS KNOWLEDGE" includes Algebra & geometry, English, and world and U.S. history. "WORLD-CLASS SKILLS" includes Critical thinking, problem-solving, Collaboration, and Communication. "LIFE AND CAREER CHARACTERISTICS" includes Health, Self-direction, Global competence, Persistence, Work ethic, and Responsibility. The infographic also features a globe and logos for the South Carolina Department of Education and the South Carolina State Board of Education.

To be career-ready, a student must meet one of the following:

1. Is a CTE completer and earns a national or state industry credential as determined by the business community; or
2. Earns a Silver, Gold or Platinum National Career Readiness Certificate (WIN) on the state-approved career readiness assessment; or
3. Earns a scale score of 31 or higher on the ASVAB; or
4. Successfully completes a state-approved work-based learning program
5. Is identified as a student with a disability who successfully completes the South Carolina High School Employability Credential (Link) according to their Individualized Education Plan (IEP).]

Moreover, students can showcase their readiness by successfully passing a state-approved work-based learning exit evaluation facilitated by an employer. This evaluation

includes a structured training agreement outlining objectives and necessitates a minimum of 40 practical experience hours, aligning with the state's designated career clusters. Furthermore, the evaluation incorporates an industry assessment derived from the training agreement, which integrates essential skills outlined in the Profile of the South Carolina Graduate. To fulfill this criterion, students must have completed at least one unit in a related pathway or a personalized pathway of study, ensuring they possess the necessary foundational knowledge and skills for their chosen career trajectory.

In brief, readiness for both college and career pathways is vital for students as they navigate the transition from high school to higher education and the workforce. College readiness necessitates not only academic proficiency but also the ability to navigate post-secondary pathways effectively, including transfer options. On the other hand, career readiness requires a blend of core academic skills, employability skills, and specialized job-specific competencies essential for success in the workplace. In South Carolina, specific criteria define both college and career readiness, ensuring that students possess the necessary skills and knowledge for their chosen paths. Meeting these benchmarks prepares students to excel academically, pursue gainful employment, and advance in their chosen careers, setting them on a trajectory toward lifelong success and fulfillment.

In light of recent educational data, it is evident that despite a commendable increase in high school graduation rates, a pronounced gap persists in African American students' college and career readiness. To effectively address this disparity, a holistic approach is imperative. As Johnson et al. (2019) emphasized, we must challenge and

overcome systemic barriers that impede African American students' success. This involves revamping educational curricula and ensuring that these students have equitable access to resources, mentorship, and opportunities that can enhance their post-graduation prospects.

Background and Context

Despite schools' efforts to continuously review the curriculum, assessments, and test scores, graduation rates have improved, but college and career readiness remain areas of concern. Hence, the district must support implementing programs that enable students to acquire college and career readiness skills. The problem of practice is that many African American students graduating high school are neither college nor career ready. The results in the State for college- or career-ready students was around 60% in the 2020-2021 school year, while the graduation rate was about 84% (SCDE, 2022).

Racial and ethnic educational inequality has a long-standing and persistent history in the United States, and opportunity gaps are an effective way of monitoring the equality of educational outcomes. The United States has a long-standing history of racial and ethnic educational inequality, which has persisted despite efforts to address the issue. The opportunity gap, which refers to the disparities in academic performance and educational outcomes between various student groups, is one way to monitor the effectiveness of these efforts (NCES, 2021).

Opportunity gaps have been prevalent for decades. Studies have shown that African American, Hispanic, and Native American students perform below their White and Asian peers on average (NCES, 2021). In 2018, the high school graduation rate for

White students was 88%, 80% for African American students, and 76% for Hispanic students. These disparities are not limited to high school graduation rates but extend to other areas, including standardized test scores, college enrollment and completion rates, career attainment, and access to advanced courses (National Equity Atlas, 2021).

The opportunity gap has significant consequences, impacting future opportunities and economic mobility for individuals from historically marginalized communities. Addressing the opportunity gap requires a collective effort to provide equitable access to quality education, resources, and support for all students regardless of their racial or ethnic background. Schools and districts must work to eliminate systemic barriers to success and implement evidence-based strategies that can help reduce the opportunity gap (National Equity Atlas, 2021).

Overview and Significance of the Problem

Conley (2012) researched the similarities and differences between college and career readiness principles, precisely the foundational skills and information required for success. "College and career readiness share many foundational skills and knowledge domains, including those that fall into the realm of 'soft skills' or noncognitive variables" (Conley, 2012, p. 8). This has led many stakeholders, including those in South Carolina, to treat college and career readiness as a single term. "College readiness is not separate from career readiness; instead, they are inextricably linked and mutually reinforcing" (Conley, 2012, p. 2). Highlighting this crucial connection between college and career readiness, it becomes evident that a holistic approach to education is essential for preparing students for their academic journeys and future professional endeavors.

A new approach is needed to address the challenges faced by African American students in achieving college and career readiness, which requires implementing various strategies in the current system. Access to quality education, increasing financial assistance, addressing discrimination, providing access to role models and mentors, and increasing social and academic support are among the key strategies to help close the opportunity gap for African American students (Losen & Orfield, 2014).

Research consistently indicates that African American students encounter systemic barriers that impede their academic and career success (NCES, 2021). One of the primary barriers is lower levels of academic achievement. According to Darling-Hammond (2010), African American students often register lower scores in standardized assessments and exhibit diminished academic performance compared to their peers. Such disparities can stem from an unequal distribution of experienced teachers, less exposure to challenging coursework, and attending under-resourced schools, which can subsequently limit their post-secondary educational and vocational opportunities.

In conjunction with academic disparities, inadequate access to educational resources poses another formidable challenge. Schools in economically disadvantaged areas, where many African American students' study, frequently lack essential resources, including modern technology, updated textbooks, and robust extracurricular programs (Kozol, 2005). These crucial resources hinder students' skill development and narrow their exposure to diverse learning experiences, weakening their college or job applications.

Lastly, discrimination remains a pernicious barrier. Steele (1997) asserts that African American students often confront implicit biases, overt racism, and stereotype threats in educational environments. Such experiences inflict emotional and psychological harm, diminish their academic motivation, and lead to unjust disciplinary actions. Gregory et al. (2010) further observed that these students face higher suspension rates, which disrupts their learning experience and further widens the educational gap.

Collectively, these systemic barriers severely compromise the ability of African American students to excel in post-secondary institutions, the military, or the professional realm, emphasizing the need for multifaceted interventions. In the context of college and career readiness for African American students in high schools, several critical challenges persist, hindering their educational attainment and future prospects. These challenges encompass ineffective instructional structures, lack of student motivation, deficient student and teacher skills, limited parent support, and inadequate college and career readiness procedures.

Firstly, ineffective instructional structures often plague schools with predominantly African American student populations. These schools frequently grapple with curriculum disparities, unequal access to advanced courses, and less experienced teachers, all of which require more rigorous educational opportunities (Reardon et al., 2019; Ingersoll, 2018). Such disparities undermine the foundation for college and career readiness by limiting students' exposure to challenging coursework.

Secondly, the issue of student motivation is closely intertwined with academic performance. African American students may confront low expectations from educators

and peers, perpetuating negative stereotypes and diminishing their enthusiasm for learning (Steele, 1997). Additionally, the lack of perceived relevance between their education and prospects can lead to disengagement (Ladson-Billings, 1994).

Thirdly, the deficit in student and teacher skills poses a substantial barrier. Academic skill gaps stemming from inequitable access to quality education in earlier grades hinder African American students' preparedness for high school (Reardon et al., 2019). Concurrently, schools in low-income areas, which predominantly serve African American students, often employ less experienced teachers, impacting the overall quality of instruction (Ingersoll, 2018).

Fourthly, low parental support and involvement levels can significantly hinder students' success. Many African American families face economic challenges that limit their capacity to provide supplementary educational resources, further exacerbating educational disparities (Lareau, 2011). Moreover, communication barriers and a lack of culturally responsive engagement between schools and parents hinder collaborative efforts (Hill & Tyson, 2009).

Lastly, inadequate college and career readiness procedures perpetuate disparities in educational outcomes. Limited guidance counseling resources in high schools, especially those serving African American communities, can result in students not receiving essential information and support for their future aspirations (Nagaoka et al., 2013). Additionally, the complex and often opaque college application process can be a daunting barrier for many African American students, impacting their ability to access higher education opportunities (Hoxby & Turner, 2013).

To comprehensively address the systemic challenges that African American students encounter, it is imperative to adopt a multifaceted approach that prioritizes equity and justice within educational environments. One foundational element involves guaranteeing equitable access to high-quality education. According to the National Commission on Teaching and America's Future (2004), the quality of education a student receives is intricately linked to the competence of their educators. It is not merely a matter of providing education but ensuring that these students have access to proficient teachers, advanced resources, and a curriculum to promote their holistic development.

Additionally, this multifaceted approach should encompass various crucial components. Equitable funding is imperative to bridge school resource gaps, enabling disadvantaged students to receive the same educational opportunities as their peers. Teacher training in culturally responsive practices ensures educators can effectively engage with diverse student populations. Furthermore, personalized student support should be a priority, acknowledging that each student's needs and circumstances are unique. Improved communication between schools and parents fosters collaboration and a better understanding students' requirements. Finally, implementing robust college and career readiness programs equips students with the necessary skills and information to navigate their future aspirations successfully.

By leveraging evidence-based interventions and advocating for policy changes that prioritize fairness and inclusivity, communities and educational stakeholders can collaboratively work towards dismantling these barriers. This collective effort aims to ensure that African American students have the same opportunities for success in high

school and beyond as their peers, ultimately promoting educational equity and social justice.

Another pivotal component is financial support. The economic challenges that many African American families face can often become insurmountable barriers to higher education for their children. Scholarships, grants, and financial aid can make a profound difference. According to a report by the *NCES* (2018), economic constraints are a primary deterrent for many students when considering college or even causing them to abandon their studies prematurely.

Further enriching the educational journey, mentoring offers a guiding light to many African American students. Through mentorship, students gain invaluable advice, personal experiences, and networking opportunities that can shape their academic and career paths. The transformative power of mentorship is well documented, with DuBois & Silverthorn (2005) illustrating its positive impact on academic performance and overall well-being.

Equally crucial is the presence of role models. African American students greatly benefit from having individuals they can admire, especially those who have navigated similar challenges and triumphed. Such figures serve as a testament to what is achievable and provide tangible inspiration for these students. Zimmerman et al. (2005) affirm the positive behavioral outcomes derived from having relatable role models.

Last but certainly not least, there is an urgent need to confront and dismantle the systemic issues plaguing the education system. Discrimination remains a deeply rooted problem, casting shadows over the potential of many African American students.

Moreover, the glaring disparity in school funding, especially in predominantly African American communities, further exacerbates the challenge, as noted by the *National Equity Atlas* (2021). To usher in meaningful change, these systemic issues must be addressed head-on with comprehensive policies and committed action.

The problem of practice guiding this research is that African American students are not graduating with the necessary skills to succeed in their future endeavors, whether college, the military, or the workforce. Addressing systemic barriers and providing access to quality education, financial assistance, mentorship, and social and academic support is necessary to close the opportunity gap and ensure that African American students succeed in their postsecondary endeavors.

In South Carolina, the challenge of improving educational outcomes is one that the state's Department of Education is keenly aware of and has been actively addressing (SCDE, 2019). Over the years, SCDE has launched a series of initiatives that target holistic student development, particularly emphasizing underrepresented demographics like African American students. For instance, the SCDE (2019) has been working on curriculum enhancements, teacher training, and community engagement programs to foster an environment conducive to academic success. Additionally, they have introduced scholarship programs and mentorship opportunities to ensure higher education access for these students (Johnson & Williams, 2020).

However, recent data suggests that there is still significant room for improvement. For example, while there have been increases in high school graduation rates, discrepancies persist in college readiness metrics among different racial and ethnic

groups, especially between African American students and their White counterparts (National Equity Atlas, 2021). These disparities underscore the importance of implementing reforms, continuously evaluating their effectiveness, and being agile in introducing modifications as required.

SCDE has underscored the significance of specific readiness metrics in charting students' future educational and career trajectories. Among these metrics, American College Testing (ACT) and SAT scores are primary indicators of a student's preparedness for higher education. Furthermore, high school graduation rates, college attendance, and subsequent employment attainment provide comprehensive insight into the effectiveness of educational strategies and how well they translate into real-world success for students. Recognizing this, South Carolina has instituted a mandatory measure: the Ready to Work Assessment. This assessment is administered to all high school students in the state and designed to holistically evaluate a student's readiness for both postsecondary education and the workforce. It serves as a diagnostic tool to identify areas of strength and weakness and as a compass guiding educational interventions and resources to where they are needed most (SCDE, 2022). This proactive approach highlights South Carolina's commitment to ensuring its students are equipped with the skills and knowledge necessary to navigate the evolving landscapes of higher education and the job market.

The SCDE has taken a proactive approach to emphasize the interconnectedness of college and career readiness within the state's educational system. This approach is evident and paramount in the state's School Report Card, a pivotal benchmark for assessing school performance throughout South Carolina. This report card is particularly

noteworthy because it treats college and career readiness as a unified concept rather than distinct categories. This approach underscores the state's recognition of the ever-evolving postsecondary opportunities available to students today. South Carolina acknowledges the diverse aspirations of its student population by emphasizing the synergy between preparing students for higher education and equipping them with the skills and knowledge required in the workforce. South Carolina actively fosters a more inclusive and adaptable educational environment. This shift in perspective signifies a commitment to providing students with a well-rounded education that empowers them to make informed choices about their future, whether it involves pursuing advanced degrees, entering the job market, or exploring alternative career pathways. As a result, the SCDE's approach to integrating college and career readiness into the School Report Card reflects a forward-thinking strategy that aligns with the changing demands of the modern world and the evolving landscape of education and employment.

The problem today is that schools strive to provide equal education, with college and career goals paramount through rigorous curricula (Curry & Milsom, 2017). However, students need to know which post-educational alternatives will serve them better when pursuing occupational programs that provide job opportunities with decent pay and even a road to higher degrees (Curry & Milsom, 2017). Research based on national data sets shows that many students with low test scores can complete credential programs and receive wages equivalent to those with higher college readiness test scores (Rosenbaum et al., 2017).

Improving the college and career readiness of African American high school graduates continues to be a complex and persistent issue in the United States (McGee, 2021). Despite efforts to promote educational access and equity, significant disparities remain between African American students and their peers regarding academic achievement, high school graduation rates, college enrollment, and degree completion (NCES, 2021). These disparities result from several factors, including systemic racism, poverty, limited access to educational resources and opportunities, and inadequate support and guidance for college and career readiness (García & Weiss, 2021).

A comprehensive approach is necessary to tackle the persistent challenge of enhancing college and career readiness among African American high school graduates (García & Weiss, 2021). This includes systemic changes in education policy and practice, targeted interventions and supports for African American students, and community-wide efforts to promote college and career readiness. Potential strategies may involve increasing funding for schools and educational programs in underserved communities (National Urban League, 2020), providing targeted academic and career counseling and support services (O'Brien et al., 2018), promoting college and career awareness through community outreach and engagement (Cherng & Halpin, 2016), and addressing implicit bias and other forms of discrimination in schools and colleges (Losen & Martinez, 2014). Ultimately, the aim is to ensure that African American high school graduates have access to the necessary knowledge, skills, and resources to succeed in college and pursue meaningful careers that align with their interests and aspirations.

Research Site

The county, located in northeastern South Carolina, is steeped in rich history and cultural significance (Darlington County Historical Commission, 2015). The county has long been a blend of urban and rural communities. The central municipalities offer glimpses of the county's diverse heritage. Historically, the county's economy was anchored in agriculture, with cotton, tobacco, and soybeans being the primary crops (South Carolina Agricultural Report, 2017). Over time, the economic landscape diversified, encompassing manufacturing, services, and more (SC Commerce Department, 2019). Educationally, the county is served by the Skyville School District (a pseudonym for privacy) and proudly hosts a university that is a cornerstone of higher learning. However, the county's claim to fame is a revered sports venue (NASCAR Official Website, 2023). It was deemed a fitting locale for the study due to its student population, its unique organizational structure, and its pivotal role in the community.

With a subtropical climate, residents experience hot summers and mild winters, emblematic of this region of the state (South Carolina Climate Office, 2020). Demographically, the county showcases a vibrant mix of cultures, with a significant African American population whose contributions have deeply enriched the local heritage (Johnson & Anderson, 2016). As a vital part of South Carolina, the county melds history, culture, and modernity in a unique Southern blend.

Skyville School District, nestled amidst urban and rural landscapes, possesses a rich history that uniquely captures the educational journeys and challenges the African American community faces in rural South Carolina. Serving as an exemplar locale, Skyville offers a profound lens into the pressing concern of African American students

needing to advance beyond high school with adequate preparedness for college or professional ventures (Johnson & Anderson, 2016). Skyville steadfastly champions the cause of educational brilliance and students' academic triumphs by spanning four high schools, three middle schools, and 11 elementary schools. Every school within the district underscores a fervent commitment to fostering vibrant learning atmospheres. By embracing innovation and championing student progress, Skyville unveils diverse academic and extracurricular programs, catering to the varied learning requisites of its pupils. This commitment is further evident in the district's collaborative ethos, actively engaging educators, parents, and community stakeholders in molding a robust educational blueprint. Skyville's unwavering commitment to cultivating a passion for learning, championing inclusiveness, and equipping its students for future challenges undeniably positions it as an educational beacon in the region.

Today, Skyville School District serves a population of approximately 9,000 students. The demographic breakdown reveals that over 55% of the students are of African American descent, about 40% are Caucasian, and nearly 2% fall under other ethnic categories. Most of these students, almost 80%, come from economically disadvantaged backgrounds. Furthermore, when considering academic performance, this district's average Scholastic Assessment Test (SAT)/American College Test (ACT) scores are below the national average by 15%.

Scholar-Practitioner: Connection to the Site

As a Director of Secondary Education with firsthand experience of the challenges faced by this demographic, I have a deep-rooted connection with Skyville School

District. I've witnessed its evolution, from my personal journey as a student who navigated economic challenges and being the first in my family to attend college, to my professional journey teaching and serving in various leadership roles within the district. This personal and professional connection provides me with unique insights and an authentic perspective on the problem of practice in the district. Having observed the district's shifts over the years, I have seen its triumphs and areas of needed growth. The interactions with students, parents, and fellow educators have deepened my understanding and commitment to fostering a more inclusive and effective educational environment. This long-term engagement and intrinsic motivation drive my determination to address the underlying issues and advocate for meaningful change within Skyville School District.

Known Data on the Problem of Practice

Local data indicates a significant college and career readiness gap, particularly among African American students. District communications and news articles highlight the initiatives taken to address this gap but underscore the need for a comprehensive approach. Although our district has made commendable strides with certain programs and special training workshops, there needs to be more data providing insights into students' and parents' perspectives about their college and career readiness. The results for college- or career-ready students were about 57% in the 2019-2020 school year, while the graduation rate was approximately 90% (SCDE, 2022). While African American students made up about 45% of the graduating class in 2020 in the district, only about 50% of them graduated college or career ready. Compared to White students, who make up

almost 44% of the graduating class, nearly 87% graduated college or career ready (SCDE, 2022).

Addressing Issues of Inequity

This study will address race, place, and socioeconomic status inequities; Skyville School District's predominance of African American students, especially those from economically disadvantaged backgrounds, positions it as a critical site for investigating systemic issues. Researching here provides an avenue to delve deep into historical, cultural, and socioeconomic factors that affect students' preparedness for higher education or the workforce.

Moreover, the confluence of urban and rural educational settings within the district offers a unique perspective on how different environments influence student performance, aspirations, and opportunities. This duality allows for a comprehensive examination of challenges and potential solutions that cater to urban and rural student populations. By deeply analyzing the nuances of Skyville's educational framework, we can develop strategies and interventions sensitive to and respectful of the cultural and socioeconomic contexts in which students live and learn. This holistic approach ensures that our efforts will be impactful and sustainable in the long run.

Informing Education Systems

By studying the Skyville School District, insights can be gleaned to inform and refine interventions, which could be scaled up to similar districts facing comparable challenges. The district's mix of urban and rural schools also offers an opportunity to assess how place impacts students' experiences and outcomes. Exploring the district in-

depth can shed light on the distinct nuances and strategies that may be particularly effective in such a diverse setting. The urban and rural dynamics present a valuable backdrop to understanding how educational approaches must be tailored to meet the unique needs of each community. Additionally, as education trends and methodologies evolve, Skyville can be a microcosm to test and adapt the most promising practices. Drawing parallels and distinctions between the two types of schools within the district can provide a broader framework for educational reform in similar mixed districts nationwide.

Rationale/Conclusion

Skyville School District offers an unmatched setting for this research, given its unique demographic mix and the juxtaposition of urban and rural influences. As a scholar-practitioner with a deeply personal connection to the district and its challenges, there is an unparalleled opportunity to make impactful and meaningful contributions to the broader body of study. Addressing the gap in college and career readiness in this district will not only benefit the students of Skyville, but it could also serve as a model for addressing similar issues in districts nationwide.

The rich tapestry of cultures, socioeconomic backgrounds, and educational challenges in Skyville paints a comprehensive picture of many issues plaguing American education today. The insights and solutions derived from this district could be pivotal in shaping policies and practices in other regions with similar demographic profiles. Furthermore, my personal stake and understanding ensure a commitment to the depth and

thoroughness of the research, aiming to bring about sustainable change and improvement in student outcomes.

Literature Review

College and career readiness (CCR) is a critical issue in education today because students must have the necessary skills, knowledge, and dispositions to succeed in the modern workforce (García & Weiss, 2021). Despite efforts to improve educational outcomes for African American students, there is still a persistent opportunity gap between them and their White and Asian counterparts regarding college and career readiness (NCES, 2021). Limited access to high-quality education, equitable resources, and barriers to academic success contribute to this gap (García & Weiss, 2021). In this literature review, I synthesize current research on college and career readiness for African American students and examine strategies to close this opportunity gap which include college and career models and policies, strategies for improving college and career readiness, and college and career readiness for African Americans.

College and Career Readiness Models and Policies

College and career readiness has become an essential topic in education in recent years, with educators and policymakers focusing on preparing students for success beyond high school. There have been numerous studies exploring different models and strategies for achieving college and career readiness, as well as examining the challenges faced by at-risk students and differences in how college- and career-readiness policies are experienced by educators.

Bragg & Taylor (2014) examined how different college and career readiness models produce similar short-term outcomes. They found that while there are differences in the specific models used, many share common elements such as career exploration, academic support, and postsecondary planning. These commonalities could be used to inform future college and career readiness initiatives.

Conley (2012) emphasizes the importance of helping all students succeed beyond high school, regardless of their backgrounds or circumstances. He proposes a college and career readiness framework that includes key cognitive strategies, academic behaviors, and contextual skills. According to Conley (2012), this framework can be used to design effective instructional programs that prepare students for success in college, career, and life.

Dougherty (2016) focuses on catching up with at-risk students to college and career readiness. She identifies several factors contributing to these students' difficulties, including low academic achievement, lack of motivation, and limited resource access. Dougherty (2016) suggests that addressing these challenges will require a comprehensive approach that includes academic, social, and emotional support.

Edgerton & Desimone (2019) explore the differences in how college- and career-readiness policies are experienced by educators. They found that teachers, principals, and district leaders have varying perspectives on the goals and strategies of these policies, which can lead to clarity and consistency in implementation. The authors suggest that greater collaboration and communication are needed to implement these policies effectively.

Finally, Durand et al. (2022) examine how leaders frame their college and career readiness discourses. Leaders often use specific language and narratives to shape perceptions and create a sense of urgency around this issue. Understanding these discourses can provide insights into how college and career readiness is prioritized and addressed in different contexts.

Overall, these studies highlight the complexity of achieving college and career readiness and the need for comprehensive, collaborative approaches that address the unique challenges different students and communities face. They also emphasize the importance of understanding how policies and initiatives are experienced and framed by educators and leaders.

Strategies for Improving College and Career Readiness

College and career readiness is a crucial goal for high school students, and there are many different approaches to achieving this goal. Some researchers have emphasized the value of experiential learning in helping students develop the skills and knowledge they need for college and career success (Carroll & Piro, 2020). Experiential learning allows students to learn through hands-on experiences and real-world situations rather than traditional classroom instruction. Carroll & Piro (2020) argue that experiential learning can help students develop skills such as communication, problem-solving, and critical thinking essential for college and workforce success.

Another approach to promoting college and career readiness is incorporating social and emotional learning into high school curricula (Dymnicki et al., 2017). Social and emotional learning involves teaching student's self-awareness, self-management,

social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making. These skills help students develop the personal and interpersonal competencies they need to succeed in college and the workforce. Dymnicki et al. (2017) argue that social and emotional learning should be integrated into existing high school courses rather than treated separately.

School counselors can also promote college and career readiness among high school students (Paolini, 2020). Paolini (2020) suggests that school counselors can help students identify their interests and strengths, explore career options, and develop a plan for achieving their college and career goals. School counselors can also help students navigate the college application process and access resources such as scholarships and financial aid.

Overall, the studies suggest that there are multiple ways to promote college and career readiness among high school students. Experiential learning, social and emotional learning, and support from school counselors are all valuable strategies for helping students develop the knowledge, skills, and competencies they need to succeed in college and the workforce. Further research is needed to determine the most effective approaches for promoting college and career readiness among high school students and to identify strategies for scaling up these approaches to reach more significant numbers of students.

College and Career Readiness for Specific Populations

College and career readiness (CCR) has become an increasingly important topic in education, as students need to be prepared for success in both their academic and professional lives. However, there are disparities in CCR achievement, particularly for

African American students and those in rural areas. This literature review examines four studies that focus on various aspects of CCR for African American and rural students: Harris et al. (2016) explore the perceptions of counselor educators on CCR for African American males, Hill (2022) examines the perceptions of African American graduates on their readiness for their first postgraduate role, Tsoi-A and Bryant (2015) identify gaps in high school educational experiences for African American students, and Roberts and Grant (2021) conduct a systematic review of the literature on CCR for rural students.

In their study, Harris et al. (2016) found that counselor educators perceived African American males to be at a disadvantage regarding CCR. They noted that these students face several challenges, including a lack of access to academic resources, insufficient college preparation, and inadequate support systems. The study also highlighted the need for more culturally responsive counseling practices to address these issues.

Hill's (2022) study examined the perceptions of African American graduates on their readiness for their first postgraduate role. The study found that participants reported feeling unprepared in several areas, including networking, job search skills, and financial literacy. Hill (2022) suggests that interventions to improve CCR for African American students should focus on developing these skills and providing more opportunities for experiential learning.

Tsoi-A and Bryant (2015) identified gaps in the high school educational experiences of African American students that contribute to lower levels of CCR. They noted that these students are less likely to take advanced courses, have access to a

rigorous curriculum, and receive guidance counseling. The study calls for targeted interventions to address these gaps, such as providing more resources for college preparation and improving counseling services.

Finally, Roberts and Grant (2021) systematically reviewed the literature on CCR for rural students. They found that rural students face unique challenges, such as limited resource access, isolation, and cultural barriers. The study calls for more research on effective strategies to improve CCR for rural students, such as increased collaboration between schools and community organizations.

Overall, the studies highlight the importance of addressing African American and rural students' unique needs in promoting CCR. The findings suggest that targeted interventions and culturally responsive practices can improve CCR outcomes and help to reduce disparities.

Closing the Opportunity Gap and Improving College and Career Readiness

The opportunity gap, reflecting disparities in educational resources and opportunities often influenced by racial, economic, or other demographic factors, remains a pressing issue in education (Darling-Hammond, 2010). As the focus on ensuring college and career readiness intensifies, it is vital to tackle this gap. This disparity, especially in the U.S., leads to varied academic achievements among different demographic groups. This gap must be addressed to ensure college and career preparedness for every student. In this section of the literature review, we will explore the findings and perspectives of several vital authors and organizations, including Wilson (2018), The Education Trust (2019), NACAC (2017), Watt et al. (2006), Durlak et al.

(2011), and Conley (2012). These sources provide valuable insights into strategies to narrow the opportunity gap and improve college and career readiness.

In a systematic research review, Wilson (2018) examines strategies from high-performing schools and districts to address the opportunity gap and bolster college and career readiness. The study identified several defining traits of these successful institutions. First, they often possess dynamic leadership that encourages a supportive, team-oriented environment, maintains high standards for everyone, and offers extra help to those students facing challenges. Second, they prioritize the caliber of their teaching staff by ensuring teachers are well-equipped, continuously trained, and adequately backed. Moreover, they allocate resources like tutoring and counseling to cater to the varied requirements of their students. Third, they emphasize data-centered decision-making, utilizing consistent evaluations to track student progress and pinpoint areas that need attention. Finally, they often build robust connections with families, communities, and other educational entities, weaving a supportive fabric that aids student success inside and outside the classroom.

Wilson (2018) concludes that implementing these strategies could help close the opportunity gap and improve college and career readiness, particularly for disadvantaged and marginalized students. However, she also notes challenges to implementing these strategies, such as limited resources, systemic barriers, and resistance to change. The findings of Wilson (2018) suggest that closing the opportunity gap and improving college and career readiness requires a comprehensive approach that involves strong leadership, effective teaching, data-driven decision-making, and community partnerships. By

implementing these strategies, schools, and districts can provide all students with the support and resources they need to succeed academically and prepare for their future careers. However, addressing the opportunity gap and improving college and career readiness remains a complex and challenging issue that requires ongoing research, innovation, and collaboration.

The Education Trust's (2019) research highlights that historically underserved student groups frequently face barriers in accessing challenging coursework, seasoned educators, and vital extracurricular activities — all pivotal in shaping future college and career trajectories. Adding to this, a 2017 study by the National Association for College Admission Counseling (NACAC) pointed out that schools with a higher percentage of students of color and those from low-income backgrounds often lack enough resources for college counseling. This deficiency further widens the readiness chasm between students.

In response to many students' pressing educational challenges, initiatives like AVID (Advancement Via Individual Determination) have been developed. AVID's unique strategy focuses on the "academic middle," referring to students who possess potential but might be overlooked in traditional settings. With targeted intervention, these students can excel beyond expectations. By granting these individuals access to a challenging curriculum and enveloping them with robust academic backing, AVID has made significant strides in leveling the educational playing field. This success, noted by Watt et al. (2006), showcases the transformative power of tailored support. Consequently,

such programs underscore the importance of personalized educational approaches in fostering student success.

Nevertheless, preparing students for future challenges is more than just anchored in conventional academic methodologies. Beyond the rigors of traditional learning, the importance of fostering social and emotional capacities in students has come to the forefront. The rise of social and emotional learning (SEL) underscores the need for a holistic approach to education. Durlak et al. (2011) highlighted how integral SEL is becoming, asserting its pivotal role in ensuring students' readiness for higher education and the professional world. Schools that have integrated SEL into their pedagogical framework not only report improved academic results but also witness the cultivation of more prosperous interpersonal relationships among students. Additionally, such schools have observed reduced instances of emotional turmoil or distress, underlining the profound impact of SEL on student well-being. This paradigm shift suggests that schools must balance cognitive growth with emotional and social development for true educational success.

In addition to the emphasis on social and emotional learning (SEL), Conley (2012) brings attention to the critical role of "key cognitive strategies" in preparing students for the future (p. 2). Skills such as problem-solving, proficient research techniques, and keen interpretative abilities are essential for thriving in higher education and navigating the challenges of today's dynamic workforce. Furthermore, integrating these skills ensures that students are equipped to adapt to a constantly changing world. Recognizing this, educators are exploring and adopting new teaching methods. Project-

based learning, which spotlight these essential strategies, stands out among these approaches. This methodology not only engages students in real-world problems but also cultivates deeper understanding, making it a potent tool in efforts to bridge the opportunity gap.

Conclusion

In delving deep into college and career readiness, particularly for African American students, the research underscores a pressing need to close the opportunity gap through comprehensive strategies encompassing academic and non-academic dimensions. This objective demands concerted collaboration among educational institutions, policymakers, and communities. Despite outlining persistent challenges, the extant literature sheds light on promising methodologies that can bolster outcomes. Emphasizing social and emotional learning, championing experiential learning avenues, and embracing culturally attuned teaching methods emerge as paramount. It is imperative that stakeholders – from policymakers to educators and researchers – persistently strive for synergy to uncover and refine approaches that bolster college and career readiness. This is especially true for those students who grapple with entrenched systemic impediments. By actively addressing and mitigating the discrepancies unveiled in the research, we stand on the cusp of forging a holistic, equitable, and efficacious educational landscape that champions the aspirations and potentials of every student.

Problem Statement, Research Question, and Guiding Question(s)

SARC Purpose Statement

Currently, schools are focused on delivering equitable education, emphasizing college and career objectives by implementing challenging curriculums (Curry & Milsom, 2017). Students are determining which post-education path would lead to better prospects, particularly when seeking employment opportunities that offer good pay and a path to advanced degrees (Curry & Milsom, 2017). Recent studies utilizing national data have demonstrated that several students with poor test scores can complete credential programs and earn salaries comparable to those with higher scores in college readiness exams (Rosenbaum et al., 2017).

The collaborative team, comprised of dedicated school and district staff at the research site, established to address the challenge of enhancing college and career readiness for African American students. The team is a meticulously structured and diverse coalition is aimed at involving critical stakeholders across the educational community. This comprehensive team includes teachers, school administration, students, parents, and community members, each assigned specific roles within the initiative, ensuring that all those affected by the issue are actively engaged in the inquiry process.

The team's diversity is a crucial aspect of its composition, as it brings together individuals with various perspectives and expertise to tackle this complex issue comprehensively. Teachers and administrators provide insights into the classroom and school environment, while students offer firsthand experiences. Parents and community members contribute their unique perspectives and resources. By involving this broad spectrum of stakeholders, the team aims to develop a holistic approach to enhancing

African American students' college and career readiness, addressing academic and socio-economic factors that may impact their success.

Teachers form the foundational component of this team as they directly interface with students and hold pivotal roles in implementing transformative changes in instructional practices. These educators are entrusted with adapting the curriculum to be culturally responsive, creating inclusive classroom environments, and incorporating innovative teaching methodologies (Gay, 2010). The administrative leadership at the school and district levels is critical in providing guidance and oversight for the initiative. They are responsible for setting the vision for college and career readiness, allocating resources, establishing goals, and fostering a school culture supporting students' growth and development (Fullan, 2014). Their active engagement involves facilitating collaboration among various stakeholders and conducting regular meetings to evaluate progress and address any challenges that may arise.

African American students are central participants in this endeavor, serving as active contributors rather than passive recipients of educational interventions. They are encouraged to voice their perspectives, articulate challenges, and share their aspirations. Their insights are gathered through one-on-one interactions, ensuring their unique needs are acknowledged and addressed (Darling-Hammond & Cook-Harvey, 2018).

The team also includes parents and community members representing the broader community impacted by educational outcomes. Their inclusion brings diverse perspectives, concerns, and advocacy to the discussion. Engagement with parents and community members is facilitated through regular community meetings, feedback

sessions, and collaborative events where their voices are heard and respected (Epstein, 2018).

Irrespective of their roles, all team members are engaged through transparent communication, active participation, and open dialogue. This engagement is sustained through frequent meetings, workshops, and feedback mechanisms that provide a platform for sharing ideas, expressing concerns, and offering suggestions. Empowerment is a central aspect of this process, providing resources, training opportunities, and leadership roles within the school community. This approach empowers team members to contribute meaningfully. It fosters a sense of shared responsibility and ownership in the collective effort to improve African American students' college and career readiness outcomes (Bryk & Schneider, 2002).

This study aims to investigate the relationship between graduation rate and college and career readiness, particularly with African American students. There is a large percentage of African American students that are graduating high school neither college nor career ready. The study aims to analyze the effectiveness of curriculum in promoting college and career readiness and examine the role of educators and the credential programs in providing opportunities and advancement in students' opportunities. Additionally, the study seeks to contribute to the ongoing discussion on equitable education by exploring whether students' post-education outcomes are affected by their college and career readiness when graduating from high school.

Research Question

What strategies and interventions can high schools implement to enhance African American students' college and career readiness outcomes?

Guiding Questions

The main objective of the guiding question is to identify effective practices that can enhance the number of African American students who graduate high school college or career ready, as per the South Carolina Department of Education's standards. This research seeks to uncover strategies and interventions to bridge the readiness gap and create equitable opportunities for African American students. By doing so, it aims to contribute to a more inclusive and supportive educational environment that enables these students to thrive academically and achieve their college and career aspirations.

Ultimately, the goal is to empower African American students with the necessary skills, knowledge, and resources to succeed in higher education and the workforce.

1. What factors contribute to African American students' lack of college or career readiness?
2. Which best practices on mentoring or advisement are most successful in boosting the number of African American students who graduate high school college or career ready?

To address these questions, it is essential to examine the various factors that may hinder African American students' college and career readiness. These factors may include socioeconomic status, access to rigorous coursework, quality of instruction, educational disparities, and social support systems (Ladson-Billings, 2006). By understanding these contributing factors, educators and policymakers can develop

targeted interventions to address the root causes of readiness gaps among African American students.

Furthermore, it is essential to delve into effective mentoring and advising practices tailored to African American students. Research has shown that mentorship and guidance from educators, peers, or community members can significantly impact students' college and career readiness (Rhodes, 2002). Identifying and studying successful mentoring and advising programs or strategies can provide valuable insights into how high schools can better support African American students on their path to readiness.

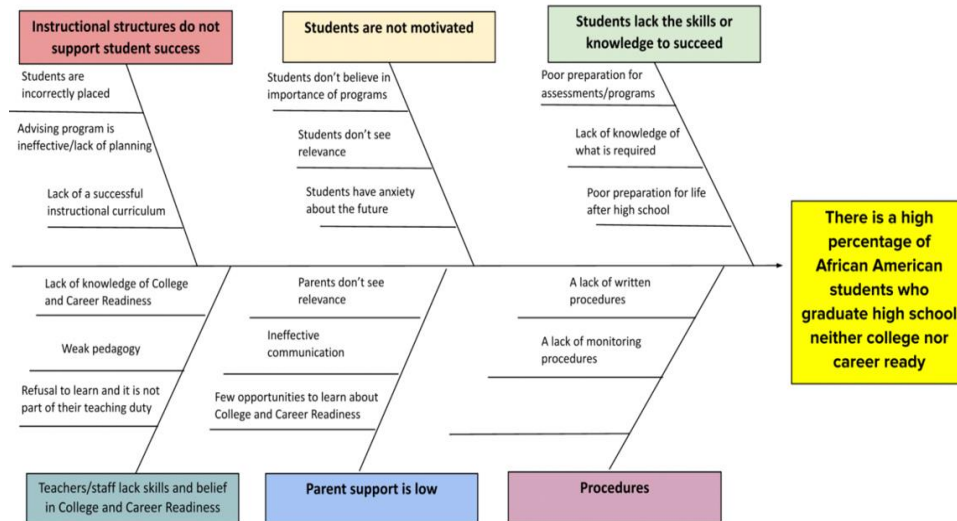
These guiding questions aim to shed light on the specific challenges faced by African American students in achieving college and career readiness and to identify effective strategies and interventions that high schools can implement to address these challenges. By addressing these questions, the research can contribute to the development of evidence-based practices that empower African American students to graduate high school prepared for success in college and their careers.

Causal Analysis of the Problem and Aim

In our effort to conduct a comprehensive analysis of the problem concerning the percentage of African American students who graduate high school, college or career ready, I employed a variety of tools and methodologies to gain a deeper understanding of the issue. My toolbox included interviews with the community, educational systems, and business members directly affected by the problem, analyzing variation using data, and applying a fishbone diagram to visualize factors. See Figure 2.1.

Figure 2.1

Fishbone Diagram



The interviews were a cornerstone of our inquiry, enabling us to connect with African American students, their families, educators and counselors, and business and college administrators. These interviews provided invaluable firsthand insights into the challenges, aspirations, and experiences of the individuals most impacted by the issue. They allowed us to form a more empathetic perspective, grounding our analysis in the lived realities of those involved.

The interviews conducted in our inquiry were meticulously designed to encompass a diverse range of perspectives and backgrounds within the African American community (Creswell & Poth.). We contacted various stakeholders, including students, parents, educators, counselors, business leaders, and college administrators (Flick, 2018). This diversity of participants was essential to ensure a comprehensive understanding of the issue. By including the voices of students and their families, we gained insight into

the personal struggles and aspirations of young African Americans navigating the education system. Furthermore, engaging educators and counselors offered valuable input on the challenges and opportunities within the educational infrastructure, shedding light on potential areas for improvement. Involving business and college administrators allowed us to explore the issue's institutional dynamics and economic dimensions.

Several justifications underpinned our decision to prioritize interviews in our research approach. First and foremost, interviews allowed for a depth of understanding that quantitative data alone could not provide (Patton, 2015). These conversations provided a platform for individuals to share their unique stories, shedding light on how educational disparities affect African American communities. Additionally, interviews allowed for clarifying and elaborating on responses, ensuring we accurately captured their experiences' intricacies. Moreover, interviews fostered a sense of trust and rapport with the participants, making them more comfortable sharing their perspectives openly. This trust was crucial in ensuring the authenticity and reliability of the data collected.

In alignment with the principles of ethical research, we obtained informed consent from all interviewees, emphasizing the importance of privacy and confidentiality (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018). We also maintained a reflexive approach throughout the interview, acknowledging our biases and preconceptions to minimize any potential influence on the responses received. By integrating these measures and engaging with a broad spectrum of voices, our interviews were a methodological choice and a cornerstone of ethical and inclusive research, enriching our inquiry and reinforcing our commitment to a

comprehensive understanding of the issues facing African American students and their communities.

The analysis of variation through data was instrumental in quantifying disparities and identifying trends within the broader context of the problem. By scrutinizing graduation rates, standardized test scores, course access, and resource allocation data, we could discern patterns and variations that illuminated disparities among student groups. This quantitative approach helped substantiate our qualitative findings and guided our exploration of potential root causes.

Using quantitative data analysis in our research was instrumental in quantifying disparities and identifying trends within the broader context of the problem (Creswell & Poth, 2018). By scrutinizing graduation rates, standardized test scores, course access, and resource allocation data (Patton, 2015), we could discern patterns and variations that illuminated disparities among student groups. This quantitative approach helped substantiate our qualitative findings and guided our exploration of potential root causes (Flick, 2018).

For instance, our analysis of graduation rates revealed a persistent achievement gap between African American students and their peers. This statistical evidence provided a concrete measure of African American students' educational disparities, reinforcing the qualitative narratives we gathered through interviews. Furthermore, by delving into standardized test scores, we identified disparities in the overall performance and specific subject areas, shedding light on areas where targeted interventions might be necessary (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018).

Course access and resource allocation data were equally crucial in our analysis. The quantitative examination of course offerings and resource allocation allowed us to pinpoint discrepancies in educational opportunities (Creswell & Poth, 2018). We observed that African American students often had limited access to advanced courses and extracurricular activities compared to their peers, contributing to unequal educational experiences. This quantitative evidence was a foundation for advocating policy changes to address these disparities (Patton, 2015).

Additionally, using a fishbone diagram provided a structured framework for categorizing and dissecting potential causal factors contributing to the problem (Ishikawa, 1989). It allowed us to visualize the interconnectedness of various elements, such as curriculum, teaching methods, socioeconomic factors, and cultural influences, which could be influencing African American students' readiness for college and careers. This analytical tool facilitated a more systematic and holistic examination of the root causes of educational disparities within the African American community. See Figure 3.1.

For several reasons, the fishbone diagram proved invaluable in our research (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Firstly, it helped us identify both immediate and underlying causes of the disparities we investigated. By visually mapping out the factors contributing to the problem, we could distinguish between symptoms and root causes (Patton, 2015). For instance, while low standardized test scores were an observable symptom of the problem, the fishbone diagram allowed us to trace back to potential underlying causes, such as inadequate curriculum alignment or unequal access to educational resources.

Secondly, the fishbone diagram facilitated collaborative problem-solving and decision-making (Denzin & Lincoln, 2017). Researchers, educators, and stakeholders could brainstorm and prioritize potential interventions. The visual representation of causal factors fostered a shared understanding of the complex web of influences affecting African American students, promoting more informed and effective strategies for addressing disparities (Flick, 2018). In summary, using a fishbone diagram provided a structured and visual approach to dissecting the root causes of educational disparities among African American students. This analytical tool enhanced the depth and clarity of our research by highlighting the interconnectedness of various factors and promoting collaborative problem-solving.

Our data analysis involved rigorous data collection, coding, categorization, and statistical examination. We meticulously examined qualitative and quantitative data, employing statistical tests and qualitative coding techniques to identify recurring themes and statistically significant disparities. Through this comprehensive analysis, we uncovered several key findings. While some initial assumptions were confirmed, such as disparities in educational outcomes, our understanding of the problem was substantially expanded. We learned that disparities in access to advanced coursework and extracurricular activities significantly contributed to the readiness gap. The empathy interviews revealed the profound impact of cultural factors on students' self-perceptions and aspirations. Moreover, data analysis underscored the importance of holistic support, encompassing academic, socioemotional, and mentorship dimensions to improve CCR among African American students.

The analysis deepened our understanding of the problem by revealing the multifaceted nature of the readiness gap and the critical need for a holistic, culturally responsive approach. It reinforced the importance of data-driven decision-making and community engagement in crafting effective interventions. Ultimately, the process enabled us to develop targeted strategies that address the root causes and enhance the likelihood of increasing the percentage of African American students who graduate high school, college or career ready.

The Problem of Practice (PoP) revolves around elevating the percentage of African American students graduating high school college or career ready. This critical issue is underscored by the persistent and troubling achievement gap that has plagued the state's educational landscape for decades (Witherspoon et al., 1997). According to a report by the SCDE (2019), the graduation rates among African American students have consistently lagged behind those of their White counterparts. Furthermore, CCR indicators, such as standardized test scores and advanced coursework completion rates, reveal significant disparities (Fregoso, 2018).

The rationale for undertaking this study is multifaceted and deeply rooted in the history of educational inequities in South Carolina. Firstly, addressing the achievement gap as a matter of social justice is imperative. African American students and other historically marginalized groups have faced systemic inequities that have impeded their educational progress (Ladson-Billings, 2006). These systemic inequities encompass disparities in school funding, access to quality teachers, and access to advanced coursework opportunities (DiMaggio, 1982).

Moreover, limited opportunities and resources have hindered African American students' success. Poverty rates among African American families in South Carolina are higher than the state average (South Carolina Budget and Control Board, 2020). This burdens students, affecting their ability to access extracurricular activities, tutoring, and college preparation resources. Therefore, addressing this issue rectifies historical injustices and creates a more equitable educational system.

In response to these challenges, the study seeks to harness the principles of improvement science to devise practical solutions (Bryk et al., 2021). Improvement science emphasizes a data-driven, iterative approach to solving complex problems in education. By engaging in continuous improvement cycles, educators and stakeholders can identify promising practices, test them locally, and refine interventions based on real-world feedback (Wood, 2017).

The significance of this study transcends the confines of South Carolina. It resonated on a national level, reflecting a broader commitment to the principles of equity and social justice in education. By addressing the pressing issue of increasing the percentage of African American students graduating high school college or career ready, this study underscored a fundamental belief that all students, irrespective of their racial or socioeconomic backgrounds, should have equitable access to quality education and the opportunity to succeed.

First and foremost, this study aligned with our education system's moral and ethical imperatives. It recognized that every student, regardless of race or economic circumstances, possesses untapped potential and deserves an equal chance to thrive

academically (Ladson-Billings, 2006). By narrowing the achievement gap for African American students, we affirmed our collective commitment to rectifying historical injustices and dismantling systemic barriers perpetuating educational disparities (Bomer et al., 2008).

Furthermore, the study's potential to serve as a model for other states grappling with similar disparities in educational outcomes was considered. The achievement gap was not unique to South Carolina but is a pervasive issue across the United States (Rothstein, 2014). Therefore, the strategies, interventions, and methodologies developed through this study have the potential to be adapted and implemented in various educational contexts nationwide.

By offering a replicable framework for addressing achievement gaps, this study contributed to the broader discourse on equity in education (Darling-Hammond et al., 2019). Policymakers, educators, and researchers in other states can draw valuable insights from South Carolina's experiences and adapt them to their local circumstances. This collective learning fostered a more cohesive and practical approach to reducing educational disparities on a national scale.

In summary, the significance of this study extended far beyond the immediate problem of increasing the percentage of African American students graduating college or career ready in South Carolina. It underscored a commitment to equity and social justice principles, aimed to ensure that every student has a fair shot at success. Moreover, it has the potential to catalyze a broader movement toward educational equity by serving as a

valuable model for other states striving to bridge achievement gaps and create a more just educational system.

The potential impact of this study on the local context of South Carolina and the broader state of education was substantial and far-reaching. By focusing on the achievement of African American students and implementing evidence-based strategies, this study effected transformative change in various dimensions of the educational landscape. Additionally, the study's outcomes set a precedent for inclusive education policies and practices, fostering a culture of equity that benefits all students, irrespective of their background. This ripple effect had the potential to reshape the education landscape in South Carolina and serve as a beacon of progress for states nationwide striving to eliminate educational disparities.

One of the immediate outcomes this study aimed to achieve is preparing African American students for success in college and careers. By equipping them with the necessary skills, knowledge, and resources, the study significantly increased their chances of accessing and thriving in post-secondary education and fulfilling career pathways (Deming, 2014). This, in turn, leads to higher earning potential and economic stability for individuals, reducing income inequality in South Carolina.

The positive impact of improved educational outcomes extends beyond individual students. Stronger communities emerge when more of their members are educated, employed, and engaged in civic life (Furstenberg, 2010). As African American students graduate college or career-ready, they are more likely to become active, contributing

members of their communities, supporting local businesses, and participating in community initiatives that promote growth and well-being.

The study's emphasis on evidence-based strategies and continuous improvement drives systemic change in South Carolina's education system (Bryk et al., 2021). Education policymakers and practitioners made informed decisions about resource allocation, curriculum development, and teacher professional development by identifying what works and does not. This data-driven approach leads to more equitable and effective education policies and practices.

As South Carolina strides toward addressing the achievement gap for African American students, it set an example for other states facing similar challenges. Sharing successful strategies and best practices can spark a nationwide conversation on equity in education (Darling-Hammond et al., 2019). Again, this ripple effect leads to a collective effort to reduce educational disparities nationally, ultimately benefiting students from diverse backgrounds across the United States.

In conclusion, this study's potential to effect meaningful change in South Carolina's education system and beyond was substantial. Focusing on evidence-based strategies can elevate graduation rates, enhance college and career readiness, strengthen communities, promote systemic change, and inspire a broader movement toward educational equity. The positive outcomes were not limited to individual students but extended to their communities and the future of education in South Carolina and the nation.

Engaging in the improvement science process aimed to develop and implement interventions that bridged the achievement gap for African American students. This included identifying and testing promising practices, refining them, and scaling up successful strategies. Ultimately, the goal is to create a sustainable, equitable education system that prepared all students for success.

The study improved educational outcomes by providing educators with evidence-based strategies to support African American students. This included tailored instructional methods, mentorship programs, and resources that can help close the achievement gap. This study added to current research by focusing on the specific context of South Carolina and emphasizing an improvement science approach. The unique aspect lay in applying localized strategies and the iterative process of refining interventions, which can serve as a model for other states facing similar challenges.

Policymakers benefited from this study by gaining insights into effective interventions to address the achievement gap. They had access to data-driven recommendations, allowing them to implement policies prioritizing equity, resource allocation, and targeted support for African American students. This knowledge empowered policymakers to make informed decisions to drive systemic education change.

CHAPTER TWO

CONSIDERING SOLUTIONS

This section of the dissertation presents a detailed framework aimed at tackling a crucial challenge in education: improving the college and career readiness of African American high school graduates. Our society is becoming more diverse and interconnected, so it is essential to ensure that every student, no matter their background, had fair access to opportunities that prepared them for success in higher education and the workforce. Despite efforts by educational institutions to improve graduation rates, there was still disparities in college and career readiness, especially among African American students. We covered various aspects related to improving the college or career readiness of African American students, including the theoretical framework for improvement, the proposed plan-do-study-act strategy, the practical measurement system, and the ethical considerations and limitations involved in implementing an action plan aimed at increasing the percentage of African American students who graduate high school prepared for college or a career.

Theory of Improvement

The CCR initiative in this study was designed for grades 9-12 and aimed to prepare all students for life after high school through an immersive, collaborative, and aligned curriculum. The initiative consisted of exercises that were completed in 30 minutes of daily instruction over a school year. Its theory of action is based on providing deliberate guidance and facilitating substantive discussions among students about core aspects of college and career preparation. This approach helped students draw

connections between their studies and their own lives, enabling them to prepare for their future and evaluate their progress.

Before attempting to prove program impacts, there was a burgeoning area of implementation science that emphasized the importance of monitoring the quality of program implementation. This entailed recording how the program is implemented in the classroom by reviewing which sections were implemented, which parts were done accurately, and what changes were made or need to be made. Mulcahy and Wertz (2021) demonstrated how universal design and Project Based Learning may be combined as they examined special needs students and if they should they be able to participate in the same student-centered initiatives as our gifted and talented students. The concepts discussed, such as inclusivity, student-centered approaches, equity, and data-driven decision-making, are relevant and applicable to the broader study of college and career readiness for African American graduates. These concepts highlighted the need for comprehensive and tailored initiatives to ensure the success of all students, regardless of their background or circumstances.

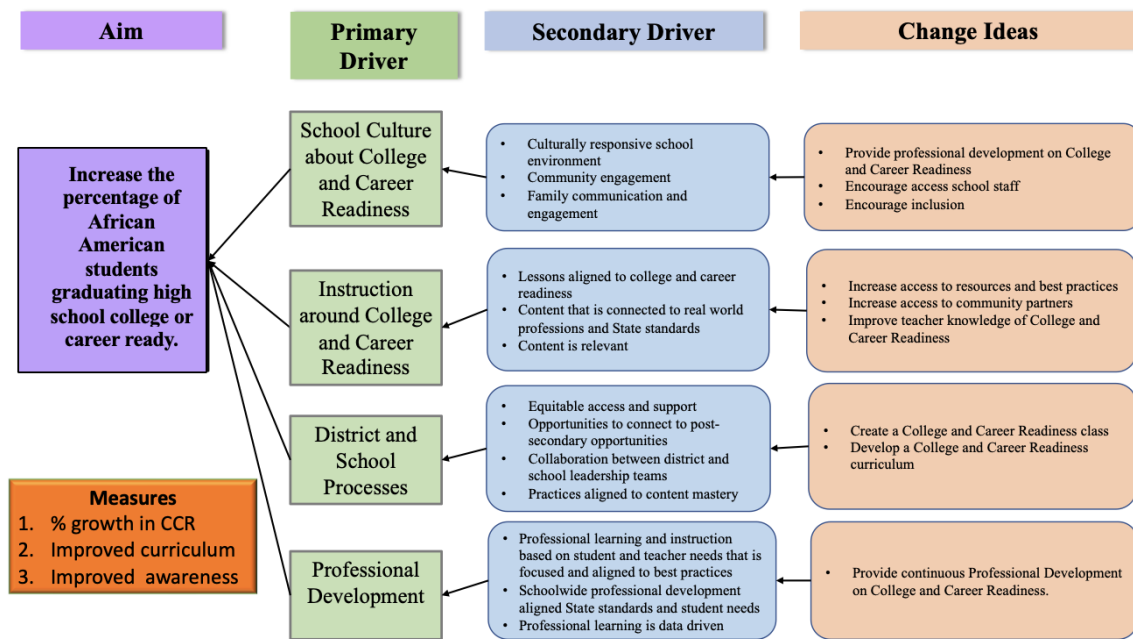
According to Hattie and Timperley (2007), providing students with opportunities to demonstrate their skills and knowledge was an effective teaching strategy. This strategy was consistent with constructivism, where students constructed their knowledge through experiences (Brooks & Brooks, 1993). The CCR course, focused on collaboration and group work, enhanced students' capacity to work with others (Vygotsky, 1978) and improved their collaboration and group abilities. As stated by Darling-Hammond (2017), every student is entitled to a meaningful education, which

requires time and effort to ensure success. See Figure 3.1. There was always room for improvement and growth, and the education of all students is essential for a lifetime of learning by empowering them in the present (Freire, 1998).

Figure 3.1

Creating a Culture of College and Career Readiness for African American Students

Theory of Improvement



The aim statement for this educational initiative, "Increase the percentage of African American students graduating high school college or career ready," was rooted in the urgent need to address disparities in college and career readiness among African American students. This aim reflected the commitment of educators, policymakers, and communities to rectify historical and systemic inequalities in the educational system. This overarching goal aligned with a broader national imperative to achieve educational equity and close achievement gaps among diverse student populations (Ladson-Billings, 2006).

Numerous studies have underscored the persistent educational disparity between African American students and their peers. These disparities are attributed to various factors, including socioeconomic conditions, unequal access to quality educational resources, and systemic biases (Ferguson, 2003; Ogbu, 2004). The aim statement acknowledged that these disparities are detrimental to the individual prospects of African American students and the social and economic well-being of the broader community and the nation as a whole.

To support this aim, various strategies and evidence-based interventions have been proposed. These strategies emphasized the importance of culturally responsive teaching practices (Gay, 2000), equitable access to advanced coursework (National Center for Education Statistics, 2019), and targeted mentorship programs (Perna et al., 2008). Furthermore, the aim statement resonated with the principles outlined in national education policies such as the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), which underscored the importance of ensuring that all students, regardless of their racial or ethnic background, have access to a high-quality education (U.S. Department of Education, 2015).

To address the needs of stakeholders, the implementation of unstacked data strategies significantly improved the overall experience and support for both students and teachers. The unstacked data strategy refers to a data analysis approach involved disaggregating data into smaller, more manageable subsets to identify patterns, trends, and areas for improvement (Rumberger, 2011). In education, unstacked data strategies involve breaking down data on student performance, attendance, behavior, and other

factors into smaller categories, such as race, gender, socioeconomic status, and special needs (National Center for Education Statistics, 2012). This approach helped educators identify opportunity gaps, disparities, and areas for improvement, particularly for marginalized groups such as African American students (Baker, 2020). Educators can use unstacked data strategies to make data-informed decisions, implement targeted interventions, and monitor progress toward desired outcomes (National Center for Education Statistics, 2012).

Additionally, it strived to simplify data processing for educators, enabling them to utilize it efficiently during Professional Learning Communities (PLC) meetings. This streamlined access to data empowered educators to engage in more data-driven discussions, identify areas for improvement in their teaching methods, and collaboratively develop targeted interventions to support African American students. Consequently, this increased focus on data-driven decision-making and professional collaboration within PLCs will foster a culture of continuous improvement in the school environment, ultimately leading to improved student performance and readiness outcomes.

The primary drivers at the core of this initiative were school culture, professional development, instruction, and processes related to college and career readiness among African American students. School culture played a pivotal role in creating an environment where every student feels valued, supported, and encouraged to pursue post-secondary education or enter the workforce with confidence. Professional development ensured that educators had the necessary training and resources to effectively teach and

mentor African American students on their college and career pathways. Instructional strategies were tailored to the specific needs of these students, addressing any unique challenges they may face. Finally, refining and optimizing college and career readiness processes, such as guidance counseling and curriculum development, were essential to meeting the initiative's objectives.

Secondary drivers in this initiative encompassed aspects like equity, engagement, and community involvement. Equity considerations ensured that all African American students had equal access to resources and opportunities necessary for their success. Engagement efforts involved actively involving students in their educational journey and fostering their enthusiasm for college and career pathways. Community involvement extended the support network beyond the school walls, with community organizations, families, and local businesses playing a role in providing mentorship, internships, and real-world experiences that contribute to students' readiness.

Several potential change ideas were considered to bring about the desired change in the percentage of African American students graduating college or career ready. These included implementing culturally responsive teaching practices, creating mentorship programs that connect African American students with successful role models, offering targeted professional development on addressing racial disparities in education, developing a comprehensive college and career readiness curriculum, and partnering with local businesses to provide student internship opportunities. Additionally, initiatives to improve communication between schools, families, and the community were explored to enhance support networks and engagement. These potential change ideas collectively

aimed to transform the educational landscape, ensuring that African American students have equal opportunities to excel and graduate ready for their next steps in life.

Logic Model

Improving CCR is a multifaceted endeavor that demanded a holistic approach to address the diverse needs of students. It encompassed academic preparedness and the development of essential life skills, including critical thinking, communication, and adaptability. To achieve this comprehensive goal, it was essential to engage students, families, educators, and communities collaboratively. Moreover, fostering a culture of continuous improvement and data-driven decision-making was crucial to monitor the effectiveness of CCR initiatives and tailor them to evolving student needs.

Firstly, providing professional development for educators was paramount. Ongoing training sessions empowered teachers and counselors with the latest insights and techniques related to CCR (Kasemsap, 2017)). This ensured that they were well-equipped to guide students effectively. Professional development included workshops on effective college application strategies, career counseling best practices, and staying up-to-date with the evolving job market and educational landscape (Hulleman et al., 2016).

Inclusivity was another pivotal change idea. Encouraging inclusion within the school community fostered an environment where all students felt valued and supported (Ginsberg & Wlodkowski, 2009). Promoting dialogue among students from various backgrounds helped broaden their perspectives and enriched their CCR experiences. They ensured students with disabilities have the necessary accommodations and resources to pursue their CCR goals (Dynarski et al., 2022).

Increasing access to resources and best practices was essential. Schools provided readily available information on college application processes, scholarship opportunities, and career pathways (Bornstein, 2013). Organizing workshops and seminars to share best practices, such as effective study habits or resume-building techniques, empowered students to make informed choices about their future endeavors (Schultz & Stern, 2013).

Collaborating with community partners was another transformative change idea. Establishing relationships with local businesses, colleges, and community organizations opened doors for mentorship programs, internships, job shadowing, and scholarships (Kane et al., 2013). These partnerships connected students with real-world opportunities, bridging the gap between education and the workforce.

Improving teacher and staff knowledge of CCR was pivotal to practical guidance (McGaughy & Venezia, 2015). Providing training on understanding and addressing the specific needs of students in their CCR journeys equipped educators to offer tailored support. This training took various forms, including workshops, online courses, or access to CCR experts who provided guidance and resources (Lamy, 1982).

Creating a dedicated CCR class within the curriculum effectively ensured that all students receive comprehensive CCR education (Clayton & Worsham, 2023). This class covered various topics, including career exploration, financial literacy, college application processes, and interview skills. It provided structured guidance, ensuring students could explore their interests and chart a clear path forward.

Lastly, developing a CCR curriculum that spans multiple grade levels was essential (Clayton & Worsham, 2023). A well-structured curriculum outlined specific

learning objectives, milestones, and resources to guide students from the early stages of career exploration to their post-graduation plans. It encompassed elements of financial planning, decision-making, and goal-setting (Lombardi et al., 2018)

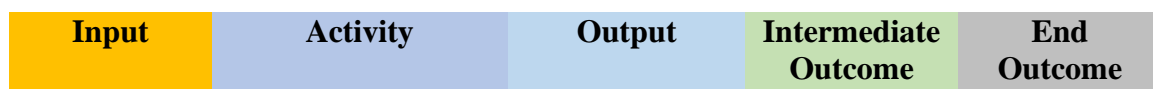
The skills taught in the program were crucial in ensuring that all students who graduate high school have a thorough understanding of how to excel and prosper in college, the workforce, or both. As students enter high school, their progress will be monitored to determine their readiness for college or career readiness. This progress monitoring process enabled schools to recommend suitable options for each student, resulting in more African American students who graduate college or career ready and increasing awareness among all stakeholders. Ultimately, the goal was to increase employability and economic opportunities for African American students. See Figure 4.1.

In conclusion, improving CCR required a coordinated effort involving educators, counselors, administrators, and community partners (Dynarski et al., 2008). These change ideas were integral to a comprehensive strategy to empower students with the knowledge, skills, and resources they need to make informed decisions about their futures and successfully transition to college or careers.

Figure 4.1

Creating a Culture of College and Career Readiness for African American Students

Logic Model



Time	Teacher Training/Preparation	Increased awareness		
Staff	Develop curriculum	Clarify and confirm education's role and approach to	Increased community involvement	Increased employment and economic opportunities for students
Materials	Assess/Interview	College and Career Readiness	Increase in the number of African American students graduating college or career ready	
Partners	Develop materials/resources	Provides resources		
Infrastructure	Provide technical assistance	Curricula is improved		
Research	Identify opportunities	Identify CCR implementation supports for all stakeholder		
	Form community partnerships			

Proposed Plan-Do-Study-Act (PDSA) Plan

Implementing a Solution

The final stage of the improvement science study was to implement a solution to increase the percentage of African American students who graduate as college or career ready. In terms of college and career readiness, the philosophies of students, teachers, and business partnerships were crucial. This work aimed to identify the roles, responsibilities, funding, and timelines required to increase employment and economic opportunities for students in the district through a comprehensive school program designed to increase the percentage of students who graduate high school college or career ready.

The proposed solution involved the implementation of a CCR course aimed at enhancing students' knowledge and understanding of the various post-high school options available to them, ultimately improving the percentage of students graduating high school as college or career ready as per the State Department of Education requirements. The CCR course was designed to equip students with the necessary skills and knowledge to fulfill the demands of college and careers in today's economy, ensuring African Americans graduate from high school adequately prepared for their future endeavors.

The CCR initiative was designed for grades 9-12 and aimed to prepare all students for life after high school through an immersive, collaborative, and aligned curriculum. The initiative consists of exercises that can be completed in 30 minutes of daily instruction over a semester (90 days), with a continuation each semester based on student needs. The theory of improvement was based on providing deliberate guidance and facilitating substantive discussions among students about core aspects of college and career preparation. This approach helped students draw connections between their studies and their own lives, enabling them to prepare for their future and evaluate their progress. See Figure 4.1.

The proposed intervention comprehensively covered all aspects of intervention analysis. It was intended to be replicated for quality improvement after identifying the need for assistance, collecting and reviewing relevant data, and considering potential solutions. The implementation allowed students and teachers to intentionally shift their perspectives on college and career readiness, benefitting all students. The daily CCR course served as a dedicated space for students to explore various college and career

readiness aspects. It covered college application processes, financial literacy, career exploration, resume building, interview skills, and goal setting. This focused curriculum ensured that students received comprehensive guidance throughout their high school years (Roderick et al., 2008).

Furthermore, this daily intervention allowed for continuous engagement and practice in essential CCR skills, ensuring students are well-prepared to transition to postsecondary education or the workforce. With consistent exposure, students can better understand the steps required to pursue their chosen paths (Clayton & Worsham, 2023). Including this daily CCR course aligned with the idea that integrating college and career readiness into the regular curriculum significantly impacted students' success (Carnevale et al., 2013). It emphasized the importance of not treating CCR as a separate entity but as an integral part of students' education.

Moreover, providing daily access to CCR education helped address potential disparities in access to resources and information, ensuring that all students, including African American graduates, have equitable opportunities for success (NCES, 2019). In conclusion, the proposed intervention of a daily 30-minute CCR course offered a structured and comprehensive approach to prepare students for their postsecondary journeys. By integrating CCR into the daily curriculum, schools empowered students with the knowledge and skills needed to make informed decisions about their futures, ultimately contributing to improved college and career readiness outcomes.

To increase the percentage of African American students who graduate as college or career ready, the improvement science study proposed implementing mentoring as part

of a CCR class. According to Mullen and Hutinger (2018), mentoring programs can enhance college and career readiness by fostering positive relationships between students and mentors, improving academic performance, and providing opportunities for personal and professional growth. The proposed mentoring class will provide African American students individualized support and guidance, emphasizing developing college and career readiness skills such as critical thinking, problem-solving, and communication. The class also incorporated activities such as job shadowing, career exploration, and college visits to expose students to various postsecondary options and opportunities (Vargas, 2020).

The mentoring class was implemented using a comprehensive program designed to address all intervention analysis aspects, as Kaufman et al. (2018) recommended. This program identified the roles, responsibilities, funding, and timelines for successful implementation. It also involved the collaboration of business partnerships and community organizations to provide students with access to additional resources and support (Mullen & Hutinger, 2018).

Implementing the mentoring class allowed students and teachers to shift their perspectives on college and career readiness intentionally. According to LoGerfo and Weber (2018), an intentional focus on college and career readiness can help students clearly understand their strengths and interests, set achievable goals, and make informed decisions about their future. By providing African American students with targeted support and guidance, the mentoring class enhanced their college and career readiness skills, increased their confidence in their abilities, and improved their prospects for success beyond high school.

The implementation of the CCR course was accompanied by continuous professional development for teachers, which was created and organized by the district. The course was designed to provide students with the necessary training and resources to successfully pursue their chosen path after high school. The skills taught in the course were crucial in ensuring that every high school graduate understands how to excel and thrive in college, the workforce, or both. The course was designed to help students develop practical study skills, good citizenship skills, character development, and career exploration through academic and career advising. Students refined their plans and prepared to choose a major within one of the sixteen Academies of Study. The CCR course and accompanying training equipped students with the necessary skills and knowledge to prepare them for post-high school life.

To ensure that students are prepared for success in college and careers after high school, they required access to information and planning tools that allow them to explore long-term college and career goals, identify the steps required to achieve those goals, and track their progress throughout high school. Furthermore, all stakeholders had roles and responsibilities in supporting students to reach their goals and ensuring that the CCR program produced the desired outcomes.

This comprehensive support system necessitated integrated data systems with online resources and tools that give students access to timely information. The instructional curriculum catered to students' learning delivery and management needs and their career growth requirements. In today's world, a high school diploma is of little value. Instead, it is about preparing students for what comes next in their journey:

college, military service, or a career. After graduation, students have numerous opportunities to achieve success. Effective programming must involve a collaborative, community-wide approach incorporating student growth strategies with districts, communities, civic groups, colleges, and employers, starting in the ninth grade.

Practical Measurement System

This section explored the carefully planned research design that seeks to uncover the reasons behind the readiness gap faced by African American high school graduates in South Carolina, our focus area. Using a mix of quantitative and qualitative methods, this research provides a comprehensive understanding of the challenges and opportunities affecting African American students' college and career preparedness in rural South Carolina. We also explain why we chose specific data analysis techniques, such as thematic analysis for qualitative data and descriptive and inferential statistics for quantitative data. Furthermore, we discussed the strategies we employed to ensure the reliability of our research findings, such as triangulation and member checks.

Data Collection

Data is one of the most valuable tools available to educators today (Levin & Datnow, 2012). By understanding our students' desires, preferences, and needs, school districts can better meet and exceed their expectations through effective lesson planning and experiences that benefit them in their future pursuits. In order to determine which teaching strategy - guided reading or direct instruction - was more effective in promoting CCR for African American students, a two-phased mixed methods study will be conducted to collect and analyze quantitative and qualitative data. This approach was

chosen to help explain the quantitative findings with qualitative results. During the qualitative phase, I collected data from surveys completed by teachers and students. A quasi-experimental study was used to explore the program over a period of time (Shadish et al., 2012).

In the quantitative phase, I collected teacher and student administered surveys, and interpreted the results. Demographic data, including graduation rates, ACT and SAT scores, and student scores on national exams such as Advanced Placement (AP), International Baccalaureate (IB), Worldwide Interactive Network (WIN), Armed Services Vocational Aptitude Battery (ASVAB), will be included in the analysis. Triangulation will be achieved through demographic data and surveys.

Surveys had numerous benefits and were utilized to gather information on teacher awareness of CCR. This data was used to enhance the effectiveness of course structures, provide insights into teacher and student satisfaction, and offer resources to help improve teaching practices and student outcomes. In high schools, CCR education is crucial as it equips students with the necessary skills for success in life. I analyzed state reports and school data on graduation rates and the percentage of African American students who passed or completed CCR criteria to compare the success of graduating students in their chosen endeavors. This information served as a baseline to increase the number of African American students who graduate high school college or career ready.

Analyzing student grades and college and career readiness data while identifying the teachers responsible for students who do not graduate college or career ready aided in driving instruction, professional development, and curriculum review. Reviewing what

was being taught and how it was being taught within the classroom setting helped identify areas that need improvement and ultimately increase the number of African American students who graduate high school college or career ready. Students who are college and career-ready possess the experience and knowledge to continue their education beyond high school, whether in formal academic settings or the workplace during their careers, enabling them to adapt to new economic situations and opportunities. To ensure that African American students meet rigorous academic standards and cultivate the soft skills necessary for success, research on best practices for college and career preparation was employed. The curriculum was designed to encourage listening and interactive problem-solving practices, and students were encouraged to consider their career options early on in their academic journeys.

Table 1.1*Data Collection*

Guiding Question	What info do I need?	How will it be collected?	Who will collect it?	When will it be collected?	What will happen after it is collected?
Why are African American students not graduating college or career ready?	Overall thoughts about CCR integration, knowledge of what it takes to become CCR	Student and Teacher Survey	Researcher	End of the research period	Researcher will analyze results to inquiry the next steps and best practices for professional development
How does the graduation rate compare to that of African American students graduating college or career ready?	Influences that keep teachers from actively seeking out/ implementing technology integration	Test data and graduation rates	Researcher	At the beginning and end of the research period	As the researcher analyzes data, it is used to pinpoint preferences and ideas to better serve students and teachers.
Who are the teachers of the African American students not graduating college or career ready?	Impacts that keep teachers from enthusiastically implementing CCR	Surveys Test data	Researcher	End of the research period	Help to guide professional development strategies after surveys have been analyzed.
What best practices are most effective at increasing the percentage of students graduating college or career ready?	Up-to-date strategies and pedagogy for CCR incorporation	Professional Learning Communities (PLCs), Research	Researcher	Tri-semesterly	Researcher will circulate perceptions after surveys have been analyzed to find best fit for next professional development and PLCs

Collecting teacher and student surveys on mentoring was relevant to the study because teachers and students played a crucial role in students' academic and personal development (Wentzel, 2002). Mentoring has been shown to significantly impact students' success, particularly for underrepresented groups like African American

students (Davis & Murrell, 1993). By gathering insights from teachers, we gained valuable information about their perspectives, experiences, and strategies related to mentoring, which can help identify practical approaches to increase the percentage of African American students who graduate high school college or career-ready (Williams, 2021).

Research has consistently highlighted the influential role of teachers in shaping students' educational outcomes and personal growth (Wentzel, 2002). Teachers served as instructors and mentors who guide and support students on their academic journey (Davis & Murrell, 1993). Through mentoring, teachers provided personalized attention, academic assistance, and socio-emotional support, all of which contribute to student's overall development and success (Wentzel, 2002).

Furthermore, mentoring has been shown to profoundly impact underrepresented student populations, such as African American students (Davis & Murrell, 1993). African American students often faced unique challenges in the education system, including disparities in resources, opportunities, and cultural relevance (Williams, 2021). Effective mentoring helped address these challenges by providing culturally responsive support and fostering a sense of belonging and empowerment among African American students (Davis & Murrell, 1993).

Collecting surveys from teachers gained valuable insights into the specific practices and approaches they use in mentoring African American students. Teachers' experiences and perspectives shed light on their challenges, their successful strategies, and the support they need to improve mentoring outcomes (Williams, 2021). This data

then informed the development of evidence-based interventions and policies to increase the percentages of African American students who graduate high school college or career-ready.

In conclusion, collecting teacher surveys on mentoring was a critical step in understanding and enhancing African American students' educational experiences and outcomes. Teachers' valuable perspectives and experiences helped identify effective mentoring practices that empowered and supported these students, improving graduation rates and college/career readiness (Davis & Murrell, 1993; Wentzel, 2002; Williams, 2021).

Data Analysis

The study focused on devising an inclusive and multifaceted approach to address the persistent challenge of increasing the percentage of African American students graduating high school in South Carolina to ensure they are college or career ready. To tackle this complex issue, the research will employ a comprehensive strategy integrating quantitative and qualitative data analysis (Creswell, 2014). By combining these two methodologies, a more profound and nuanced understanding of the problem will be attained, allowing for the formulation of well-informed, evidence-based solutions.

The quantitative aspect of the data analysis will involve collecting and examining statistical information from various educational institutions and official records. This data will encompass graduation rates, standardized test scores, attendance records, and other relevant metrics (Trusty et al., 2004). By meticulously crunching these numbers and employing statistical tools (SPSS), patterns and trends that have previously eluded

understanding may be brought to light. Moreover, this quantitative analysis will identify potential systemic issues and disparities affecting African American students' educational outcomes, providing a solid foundation for targeted interventions (Riegle-Crumb et al., 2019).

Complementing the quantitative research, the study will also incorporate qualitative data analysis to gain insights into African American students' lived experiences, perceptions, and challenges within the educational system. The narratives of students and teachers will be captured through surveys (Howard, 2001). This qualitative exploration is crucial as it delves into the human aspect of the issue, revealing unique barriers that may not be apparent through statistics alone. By amplifying the voices of those directly impacted, the research can identify culturally relevant strategies that foster an inclusive and empowering learning environment, thereby nurturing higher graduation rates among African American students in South Carolina (Lee, 2007).

In conclusion, my forthcoming dissertation will strive to contribute to the ongoing efforts to improve educational equity in South Carolina. By combining quantitative and qualitative data analysis, the study will offer a comprehensive understanding of the challenges faced by African American students, paving the way for evidence-driven strategies that foster academic success and increase college or career readiness. Ultimately, the aim is to create a more equitable and just educational landscape where every student has a fair opportunity to thrive and reach their full potential, regardless of their background (Losen & Orfield, 2002).

Once coded, the qualitative data will undergo a thematic analysis, a widely recognized and effective method for identifying and analyzing patterns within the data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Thematic analysis is particularly suitable for capturing the nuances and complexities inherent in qualitative data, as it allows researchers to explore the richness and depth of participants' experiences and perspectives (Nowell et al., 2017).

The thematic analysis involves systematically organizing and interpreting the coded data to identify recurrent themes, patterns, and meanings that emerge from the responses (Braun & Clarke, 2006). By examining the data, researchers gain a deeper understanding of the underlying concepts, relationships, and the participants' narratives (Braun & Clarke, 2019). This analysis method allows for a more nuanced and detailed exploration of the data, enabling researchers to capture the diversity of viewpoints and experiences expressed by educators, students, and parents in the study.

Furthermore, thematic analysis allows researchers to adapt to the data's complexity and to delve into unexpected or unanticipated findings (Nowell et al., 2017). This adaptability is particularly valuable in studies like this, where the goal is to explore the multifaceted nature of the educational experiences of African American students in South Carolina. By embracing the richness of the data, thematic analysis empowers researchers to generate a comprehensive and contextually grounded account of the participants' experiences (Braun & Clarke, 2019).

In conclusion, employing thematic analysis for the qualitative data in this study offers a robust and insightful approach to uncovering and interpreting the patterns and themes within the participants' responses. This methodological choice ensures that the

research findings are rooted in the voices and experiences of the participants, providing a comprehensive and nuanced understanding of the factors influencing the educational outcomes of African American students in South Carolina.

For the quantitative data obtained from school records and standardized test scores, the analysis will involve two main types of statistical approaches: descriptive statistics and inferential statistics. Descriptive statistics will be utilized to summarize and present the key features of the data clearly and concisely (Portney & Watkins, 2015). Measures such as mean, median, mode, standard deviation, and percentiles will be employed to provide an overview of the data's central tendency, variability, and distribution.

Furthermore, applying inferential statistics in this study aims to draw conclusions and make inferences about the larger population of African American students in South Carolina (Grove et al., 2019). These statistical techniques will allow for examining relationships between different variables, such as the correlation between graduation rates and attendance records or the association between test scores and college readiness. Through inferential statistics, researchers can make predictions and generalizations beyond the specific sample studied, helping to inform broader educational policies and practices.

The analysis will not be limited to a single cycle but will instead be an iterative process involving multiple iterations. This iterative approach allows for continuous refinement and revisiting of the data, ensuring thoroughness and accuracy in the analysis (Palinkas et al., 2015). By conducting multiple cycles of analysis, researchers can identify

any potential errors or inconsistencies in the data, verify the robustness of the findings, and gain deeper insights into the research problem.

Moreover, the iterative nature of the analysis aligns with the principles of a rigorous and comprehensive research methodology, as it fosters a systematic and methodical examination of the quantitative data (Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004). Through repeated analysis cycles, researchers can enhance the reliability and validity of their conclusions and recommendations, thereby strengthening the overall quality of the research study.

In conclusion, combining descriptive and inferential statistics with an iterative analysis process will provide a robust and comprehensive examination of the quantitative data. This methodological approach ensures that the research findings are grounded in sound statistical principles and offers valuable insights into the factors influencing the educational outcomes of African American students in South Carolina.

To ensure trustworthiness in the data analysis, I will employ several rigorous strategies that enhance the credibility and validity of the findings. One crucial approach is triangulation, which involves cross-verifying the results by examining data from multiple sources or employing various research methods (Denzin, 1978). In this study, triangulation will be applied by incorporating qualitative data from surveys and interviews with educators, students, and parents and quantitative data derived from school records and standardized test scores. This triangulation of data sources strengthens the robustness of the findings, as the convergence of evidence from different perspectives and methodologies increases the confidence in the conclusions drawn from the research.

Another essential strategy for ensuring trustworthiness is the implementation of member checks, also known as respondent validation (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). After completing the analysis, the researcher will share the preliminary findings with the participants, allowing them to review and provide feedback on the accuracy and representation of their views and experiences. Member checks validate the data and empower the participants by actively involving them in the research process. This step enhances the study's credibility, ensuring the interpretations and conclusions align with the participants' lived realities and perspectives.

By employing triangulation and member checks, I will establish a rigorous and transparent approach to data analysis, addressing potential sources of bias or misinterpretation. These strategies contribute to the trustworthiness of the research findings, providing greater confidence in the validity and reliability of the results (Creswell & Miller, 2000). Moreover, these verification methods align with the principles of quality research, emphasizing accountability and rigor in the analysis process (Tracy, 2010).

In conclusion, adopting triangulation and member checks as part of the data analysis process contributes to the trustworthiness of the study's findings. These strategies enhance the credibility and validity of the results by substantiating the conclusions through multiple data sources and validating the accuracy of the interpretations with the participants themselves.

The strategies and methodologies for data analysis in this research are firmly grounded in well-established frameworks and reputable scholars in the field of qualitative

research. For the initial stage of qualitative data analysis, the open coding approach will be applied, following the guidance of Strauss and Corbin (1990). This approach involves the systematic and in-depth examination of the data to identify initial codes and categories. By staying true to this framework, the researcher ensures that the open coding process is conducted rigorously and consistent with established qualitative research practices.

The subsequent stage of thematic analysis in this study is aligned with the methodological framework proposed by Braun and Clarke (2006). The thematic analysis involves organizing and interpreting the identified codes to develop overarching themes that capture the essence of the data. Following Braun and Clarke's guidelines ensures a structured and comprehensive analysis, leading to the extraction of meaningful and contextually relevant themes from the qualitative data.

Moreover, to ensure the trustworthiness of the research findings, the researcher will adopt procedures informed by the work of Shenton (2004). Shenton's insights on ensuring trustworthiness in qualitative research provide valuable guidance for validating the data analysis process. By implementing member checks, the researcher allows participants to review the findings and provide feedback, ensuring their perspectives are accurately represented. This process contributes to the credibility and authenticity of the research findings, as the participants' voices and experiences are given prominence and validation.

Overall, by anchoring the data analysis strategies in established frameworks and drawing on the expertise of respected scholars like Strauss and Corbin, Braun and Clarke,

and Shenton, this research ensures a robust and methodologically sound approach to understanding the experiences of African American students in South Carolina's educational system. This adherence to established methodologies enhances the reliability of the study's results and strengthens the overall quality and trustworthiness of the research.

Ethical Considerations and Limitations

Research has shown that African American students are less likely to graduate high school ready for college or a career than their White counterparts (Harry & Klinger, 2014). This highlights the need for targeted interventions and support to ensure African American students have an equal chance at success. To address this issue, African American students must graduate high school with a comprehensive understanding of the available employment options, the necessary education and training, and a plan to achieve their goals (ACT, n.d.). College and career readiness is critical for all African American students to succeed in post-secondary education and gainful employment.

High schools must provide comprehensive resources and support for students to ensure they are prepared for the challenges of the workforce (ACT, n.d.). These resources may include academic counseling, mentoring programs, and access to career and technical education courses (Maheshkar & Sharma, 2018). Additionally, high schools must engage with local businesses and community organizations to provide students with real-world experiences and opportunities for networking and professional development (Radcliffe & Bos, 2013). By providing these resources and support systems, high schools can help ensure African American students are prepared to succeed in college and career.

Ensuring Academic and Social Success

Pak et al. (2020) propose an integrative approach to professional development for supporting college and career readiness (CCR) standards in education. This approach involves utilizing a structured interview method to investigate how district leaders from five states in the United States are creatively adapting and integrating a professional development framework to implement CCR standards. The authors argue that this approach is necessary to meet the demands of mandated educational policies and ensure that students are adequately prepared for postsecondary education and employment.

According to the National Center for Education Statistics (2021), education aims to instill values, knowledge, and skills that enable students to become productive members of society. This includes teaching them about right and wrong and promoting positive behavior through incentives and consequences. Additionally, the American School Counselor Association (2018) emphasizes the importance of preparing students for postsecondary education and the workforce through college and career readiness programs. Educators play a critical role in helping students explore their interests and career options and understanding the potential outcomes of their decisions.

By providing students with resources and support through the college and career readiness program, educators can help students make informed decisions about their future and achieve their goals. Mulcahy and Wertz (2021) say that the number of disengaged students and students at risk of not completing high school is a concern for today's teachers, leaders, and educational reform advocates. This school disengagement contributes to the more-than-double dropout rate of students with disabilities compared

with students without disabilities and a high school graduation rate for students with disabilities of only 67% in 2017 (Mulcahy & Wertz, 2021).

Giving students options and teaching them what they need are considered the same things. The approach used to teach these, and other ethical principles will be better informed once our intended results have been determined. Lenette (2022) says that the goal is to facilitate integrated research that incorporates close-up observation, rigorous theory and social critique with an aim to obtain a holistic understanding of how informants see their environment and how they understand the challenges they face in daily life. Examining how everyone feels and being sensitive to what matters to them is an important part of improving the district's college and career readiness. The district must be aware of the standards for developing a college and career curriculum that is inclusive of all students.

Equity and Inclusion

Equity and inclusion are critical considerations in implementing the intervention to support African American students' college and career readiness. While our primary goal is to address the existing disparities faced by African American students, it is equally crucial to ensure that our efforts do not unintentionally exclude or disadvantage other minority groups, thus perpetuating inequalities (Pak et al., 2020). The challenge lies in balancing providing targeted support to one specific group and fostering an inclusive environment for all students (NCES, 2021).

To address these challenges, we have devised several concrete steps. Firstly, we will conduct a thorough impact assessment to ascertain that the intervention benefits all

students equitably. This assessment will include an in-depth analysis of the outcomes and experiences of students from various racial and ethnic backgrounds, ensuring that no group faces negative consequences due to our intervention (ACT, n.d.). Moreover, we will establish a monitoring system to continuously track the intervention's effects on different racial and ethnic groups, enabling us to promptly detect any disparities that may emerge (Maheshkar & Sharma, 2018).

Furthermore, we are committed to promoting diversity and inclusion throughout developing and delivering our resources and support systems. This will entail engaging with a diverse group of stakeholders to ensure that the intervention is culturally sensitive and considers the unique needs of all students (Radcliffe & Bos, 2013). By actively involving a broad range of perspectives and experiences, we aim to create an environment where every student has the opportunity to thrive (American School Counselor Association, 2018). In this way, we will support African American students' college and career readiness and foster a more equitable and inclusive educational environment for all.

Data Privacy

Collecting and analyzing sensitive student data was integral to the intervention's research and improvement efforts. However, these activities raised significant concerns related to privacy and confidentiality (Harry & Klinger, 2014). Safeguarding this data was a paramount challenge, as it required balancing the imperative to use data for enhancing educational outcomes while respecting the rights and privacy of students (Mulcahy & Wertz, 2021).

To address these challenges effectively, we outlined several crucial steps. Firstly, we established strict data protection protocols encompassing encryption, secure storage, and limited access to personally identifiable information (Pak et al., 2020). These measures ensured that the data collected remained confidential and was protected against unauthorized access or breaches (Lenette, 2022). Moreover, we were committed to complying with relevant data protection laws, such as the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA) in the United States, which governs the privacy of student records and data (NCES, 2021). Adhering to legal requirements served as an additional layer of protection for students' sensitive information.

In addition to these technical and legal safeguards, we prioritized obtaining informed consent from parents and students when collecting sensitive data. This process entailed a transparent and comprehensive explanation of how the data would be used, the protective measures in place, and the potential benefits of participation (ACT, n.d.). By involving parents and students in the decision-making process and ensuring they fully understood the implications of data collection, we aimed to respect their autonomy and privacy rights while contributing to improving the intervention. In summary, these steps collectively formed a robust framework for addressing the ethical considerations of data privacy and confidentiality in the plan.

Bias and Stereotyping

Ensuring that the resources, counseling, and mentoring provided to students are devoid of biases and stereotypes was a pivotal consideration for promoting equitable development among all students (American School Counselor Association, 2018).

However, the challenge was in unconscious biases among educators and mentors, which could inadvertently influence students' decisions and experiences (National Center for Education Statistics, 2021). These steps collectively constituted a proactive strategy to address the challenge of unconscious biases and stereotypes in our educational intervention, ensuring that resources, counseling, and mentoring remain equitable and supportive of all students' development.

To address this challenge effectively, a series of concrete steps were devised. First and foremost, regular training and awareness programs were implemented for educators and mentors aimed at helping them recognize and address their biases (Maheshkar & Sharma, 2018). These programs equipped them with the tools and knowledge necessary to create an environment free from biases and stereotypes, enabling them to better support students in making informed choices. Additionally, we emphasized using diverse and inclusive curriculum materials and resources (Radcliffe & Bos, 2013). This approach ensured that the content students encountered reflected a variety of perspectives, backgrounds, and experiences, thereby reducing the risk of perpetuating biases and stereotypes.

Furthermore, we encouraged open and constructive dialogue among educators, mentors, and students about the presence of stereotypes and their potential impact on students' decisions (Pak et al., 2020). By fostering an environment where these discussions are welcomed and embraced, we aimed to raise awareness of biases and promote critical thinking among students. This, in turn, empowered students to make

choices that align with their true interests and aspirations, free from the influence of stereotypes.

Informed Consent

Obtaining informed consent from students, particularly minors, was critical when they were involved in research or data collection (ACT, n.d.). The challenge at hand was ensuring that students clearly understood the purpose, potential risks, benefits, and their right to decline participation without facing adverse consequences. These steps constituted a robust framework for obtaining informed consent in our research or data collection endeavors, prioritizing transparency, understanding, and respecting students' rights.

To address this challenge effectively, we delineated specific steps to be implemented. Firstly, we developed clear and accessible consent forms that were written in plain language (NCES, 2021). These forms explicitly explained the goals, the potential implications of participation, and the safeguards in place to protect their privacy and well-being. By simplifying the language, we aimed to make the information more understandable to students and their parents.

Additionally, we provided ample opportunities for students and parents to ask questions and seek clarification regarding the research (Mulcahy & Wertz, 2021). This was achieved through one-on-one discussions or accessible communication channels, ensuring that concerns or doubts are addressed comprehensively. Moreover, we were committed to respecting students' autonomy and right to decline participation without consequences (Lenette, 2022). Students should not feel pressured or coerced into

participating, and they were informed that their decision would not negatively impact their educational experience or opportunities.

Transparency and Accountability

Ensuring transparency and accountability throughout the intervention was crucial, as it built trust among stakeholders and fostered a sense of ownership in the process (Maheshkar & Sharma, 2018). However, we faced balancing this transparency with the need to protect sensitive information and data collected as part of the intervention. These steps collectively form a robust framework for maintaining transparency and accountability in our intervention, striking a balance between openness and data protection.

To address this challenge effectively, we outlined specific steps to guide our approach. Firstly, we created a clear, comprehensive communication plan for stakeholders (Pak et al., 2020). This plan provided a detailed outline of the intervention's goals, processes, and anticipated outcomes. By clearly articulating our intentions and methods, we aimed to keep stakeholders well-informed and engaged in the initiative while safeguarding sensitive information (Lenette, 2022).

Furthermore, we committed to regularly reporting on the progress and impact of the intervention (American School Counselor Association, 2018). These reports maintained transparency and accountability, demonstrated the initiative's effectiveness, and showcased the responsible use of sensitive data. By sharing outcomes and insights, we aimed to build trust and confidence among stakeholders while upholding ethical standards (Mulcahy & Wertz, 2021).

Cultural Sensitivity and Inclusivity

Ensuring that the intervention was culturally sensitive and inclusive of diverse perspectives and backgrounds was paramount (Radcliffe & Bos, 2013). However, the challenge we faced was adapting the program to meet a diverse student population's unique needs and preferences while maintaining its effectiveness and impact. These steps collectively formed a comprehensive strategy for ensuring the intervention remains culturally sensitive and inclusive, acknowledging our student population's rich diversity of perspectives and backgrounds.

To address this challenge effectively, we developed a series of steps to guide our approach. Firstly, we actively consulted with community leaders and cultural experts during the program's design and delivery phases (American School Counselor Association, 2018). These consultations provided valuable insights into the cultural nuances, values, and preferences of the diverse student population we aim to serve. By incorporating this expertise, we tailored our intervention to be more culturally relevant and responsive.

Additionally, we were committed to offering resources and support systems that reflect the cultural diversity of the student population (Pak et al., 2020). This included curriculum materials, counseling approaches, and mentorship models that resonate with the various cultural backgrounds represented within our student community. This approach ensured that students could relate to and engage with the resources provided, enhancing the intervention's impact.

Furthermore, we actively encouraged feedback from students and parents regarding the program's cultural appropriateness (National Center for Education Statistics, 2021). By creating accessible feedback mechanisms, we enabled stakeholders to express their thoughts and concerns, ensuring that their voices are heard and valued. This iterative feedback loop allowed us to make continuous improvements and adaptations to meet the diverse cultural needs of our students.

CHAPTER THREE

INTRODUCTION TO THE FINDINGS

At the center of our research was the urgent need to improve African American high school graduates' college and career readiness. This was done within the context of the PDSA approach and the larger field of improvement science. This project sought to close the current equity gap in educational opportunities and outcomes for African American students, making it more than just an academic undertaking. It also addressed a critical societal need. With its evidence-based, iterative process, the PDSA cycle offers a structured way to comprehend and resolve difficult issues through preparation, action, observation, and reflection. Using the PDSA paradigm, this study methodically investigated interventions that can improve African American high school graduates' college or career readiness.

Identifying and applying efficient, fair, and long-lasting tactics in enhancing African American students' preparedness for post-secondary education and professions forms the main body of our findings. This PDSA cycle trip started with a thorough examination of the current state of educational inequities to identify the underlying reasons and circumstances that contribute to African American students' inadequate readiness for life after high school. During the planning phase, we collaborated with educators, learners, families, and community stakeholders to co-design culturally sensitive interventions that are specific to the needs of African American learners.

During the "Do" phase, interventions were implemented in specific high school settings, and the process was closely observed to guarantee consistency and tackle any new issues that arose. During the "Study" phase, we carefully examined quantitative data to see how these interventions affected students' preparedness for careers and college. This evidence-based analysis was essential to figuring out what succeeded, what failed, and why.

A crucial stage in the PDSA cycle, the "Act" phase, involved honing our plans in light of the knowledge gathered from the study phase. This cycle of action and introspection continues, with each cycle providing additional insight into the intricate interactions among variables influencing African American high school graduates' preparedness for college or career and improving our strategy for more significant interventions.

We laid the groundwork in this introduction for a thorough examination of our experience with the PDSA cycle, emphasizing the important realizations we made and the useful applications of our conclusions. This work contributes to the larger conversation on how to improve African American students' educational results by providing educators, legislators, and community leaders who are dedicated to improving the lives of these young people with evidence-based tactics and suggestions.

Implementation Journey

The intervention aimed to improve college and career readiness for African American high school graduates. This large-scale project needed a solid base of cooperation, flexibility, and ongoing education. As we started this journey, it became

clear that our capacity to collaborate closely with teachers, students, and community leaders would be critical to our success. We were able to customize our tactics to fit the particular requirements of the pupils we were trying to assist because of this cooperative approach. We developed a sense of cooperation that was essential to the creation and execution of the program through open communication and common goals.

The intervention's narrative is being told with great attention and strategic preparation. Realizing how difficult it was to get students ready for success in postsecondary education, we took the time to learn about the obstacles they had to overcome and came up with solutions. During this planning stage, a great deal of study was conducted, experts were consulted, and successful models from related initiatives were analyzed. Our approach changed in response to fresh perspectives and the students' shifting needs. This adaptability made sure that our strategy stayed current and efficient, which allowed us to move closer to our objective.

To execute our intervention, community involvement was essential. We recognized that the difficulties African American high school graduates faced had deeper roots in larger social and economic contexts than just academic ones. Through fostering relationships with local businesses, families, and organizations, we established a supportive network that transcended the classroom. These collaborations gave students access to tools, mentorship, and practical experiences that enhanced their educational path. Furthermore, by fostering community buy-in and trust, this involvement strengthened the program's base and effects.

The methodical implementation of process controls provided a thorough road map of our advancements, difficulties, and victories. We were able to gather important information about program efficacy, student results, and opportunities for development through continuous monitoring and assessment. These revelations not only helped us make decisions, but they also gave stakeholders an open narrative of our journey. Celebrating our victories inspired the group and the neighborhood while being transparent about difficulties and promoting group creativity and problem-solving. Our learning process was greatly aided by this strict commitment to measurement and reflection, which made sure that our intervention changed over time to match the changing demands of African American high school graduates aiming for college and career readiness.

Collaboration and Planning

The initiative's first phase began with the deliberate establishment of a coalition that included a wide range of stakeholders, including industrial partners, educators, students, and community leaders. This cooperative team, which brought together a diverse variety of ideas and experiences, was essential to the program's beginning. The principal objective of the coalition was to carry out an exhaustive examination of the current educational environment and pinpoint crucial domains where intervention could provide a noteworthy influence on the college and career preparedness of African American high school students. By working together, we were able to identify four key intervention pillars: mentorship programs, career counseling, academic help, and enhanced exposure to college surroundings. By addressing students' scholastic and

socioemotional needs, this all-encompassing strategy attempted to provide a well-rounded support network.

Our next step was to create a strategy plan to integrate these components methodically throughout the participating high schools after identifying the essential areas of intervention. The strategy was created with a deep awareness of the particular difficulties and goals faced by African American students. We committed to customizing each component of the intervention—academic support, career counseling, mentorship, and college exposure—to match the unique requirements and circumstances of each student group because we knew that a one-size-fits-all strategy would not work. In order to optimize engagement and impact, this required not just tailoring the program content but also taking into account the most effective delivery strategies and schedules. The objective was to design a smooth, integrated support system that connected with the students it was intended to assist on a personal and meaningful level.

This customized strategy played a key role in making sure the community truly accepted the treatments rather than just implementing them. Through early engagement with key stakeholders and ongoing consultation, we cultivated a sense of ownership and collaboration among people who were directly affected by the program. The use of an inclusive strategy facilitated the establishment of trust and enabled the intervention's goals to be in line with the community's beliefs and ambitions. In order to maintain the interventions' responsiveness to the changing needs of the students, it also permitted real-time feedback and modifications. It was essential to have this connection between the

community's expectations and the program's goals in order to produce long-lasting, significant results.

Even when the program was put into action and continued to grow, the teamwork continued long after the planning stage. Students were surrounded by a vibrant and encouraging environment because of the continuous involvement of educators, students, community leaders, and business partners. The establishment of a vast network of support was made possible by this collaboration in addition to the exchange of resources and knowledge. The alliance expanded the program's reach and solidified its basis by uniting to support the goal of improving African American high school students' college and career readiness. In the end, the intervention's collective approach made it possible for it to have a significant and long-lasting effect, proving the ability of communities to influence significant changes in education.

Engaging and Adapting

As we moved on with our trip, we entered the "Do" phase of our effort, starting trial projects in a few chosen schools. A significant step in achieving our objectives was the launch of these pilot programs, which put an emphasis on mentorship, career counseling, academic support, and exposure to college environments designed with African American students in mind. We closely monitored a number of process indicators in order to assess the direct impact and efficacy of our interventions. These included keeping an eye on the number of people who attended workshops on college readiness, the degree of participation in mentoring programs, and the regularity with which career counseling services were used. These measurements gave us an accurate, up-to-date

picture of how well our efforts were being received and indicated areas that might require modification.

As part of our dedication to flexibility and responsiveness, we built strong feedback loops with all relevant parties. With this strategy, we were able to continuously gather insightful information from students, teachers, and community partners. Their input was crucial in helping us comprehend the restraints of student involvement and pinpoint any obstacles to program participation. We were able to quickly identify areas for improvement and make sure that our interventions continued to be in line with the requirements and preferences of our target population by keeping lines of communication open.

Our observation of lower-than-expected attendance at our college preparation sessions was a very eye-opening experience. This first obstacle made us reconsider and rearrange how we approached these sessions. We switched to more adaptable in-school programs in recognition of high school students' hectic schedules and varied obligations. In addition, we included virtual workshop choices for students who were unable to participate in person. These calculated changes turned out to be a game-changer, as student participation significantly increased. The rise in attendance demonstrated unequivocally that our interventions were becoming more approachable and applicable to the lives of the students.

These encounters made clear how crucial it is to be adaptable and creative in our methods for helping African American high school students. Through proactive feedback response and strategic strategy modification, we were able to improve the efficacy of our

interventions. The increased rates of involvement and attendance were evidence of the students' rising interest in our curriculum. It also reaffirmed the importance of constant development and modification to satisfy our target audience's changing needs. This initiative's phase demonstrated how important it is to make adjustments in real-time if we're going to increase African American high school graduates' college and career readiness.

Overcoming Challenges

We faced challenges throughout our initiative that put our adaptability and resilience to the test. Maintaining constant communication and support among the numerous parties involved proved to be a considerable issue, even with the careful planning that went into preparing our interventions. Each member of this group had their own schedules, resources, and expectations. It consisted of educators, students, community leaders, and industry partners. The complex process of coordinating these disparate components frequently resulted in miscommunications and delays, endangering the efficient running of our initiatives. These difficulties highlighted the requirement for a stronger framework for communication to ensure that everyone is informed and involved.

There was a setback in conducting the pre-survey because of a delay with the Institutional Review Board (IRB) office. We could not acquire baseline data before executing our intervention since we could not perform the pre-survey within the expected timetable due to the delay in obtaining IRB approval. Even though the post-survey was effectively finished following IRB approval, our study is limited since the pre-survey's baseline data were unavailable.

We made the decision to improve our communication tactics in order to address the problem of breakdowns and misalignments in communication. Understanding the need for consistency and clarity in our communications, we gave the creation of more defined responsibilities for each stakeholder top priority. Because of this clarity, there was less confusion, and everyone knew exactly what their roles were and how they might contribute to the initiative's success. We also started holding frequent check-in meetings as a way for all parties involved to get together, exchange updates, and talk about any issues or recommendations. This proactive strategy had a key role in promoting an environment of transparency and cooperation.

Our intervention underwent a radical change when these enhanced communication techniques were put into practice. We established a regular engagement rhythm through the implementation of check-ins, which facilitated the prompt detection and resolution of concerns. These meetings turned into an essential platform for planning, troubleshooting, and reiterating our shared dedication to our project's goals. They made sure that everyone who took part—from students to community leaders—felt heard and appreciated, which improved the cohesiveness and efficiency of our group projects. The smoother implementation of our projects and the higher level of satisfaction among stakeholders demonstrated the positive impact of these adjustments.

In the end, the difficulties we encountered in guaranteeing efficient support and communication proved to be insightful teaching moments. They helped us understand the need for adaptability, precisely defining our roles, and the necessity of regular, planned interactions to maintain the momentum of our project. By modifying our approaches to

surmount these obstacles, we enhanced not only the functional facets of our intervention but also strengthened the mutual trust and collaboration among all stakeholders. This evolution demonstrated how obstacles may be turned into opportunities for success with persistence and strategic changes, even though the road to important accomplishments is frequently paved with them.

Celebrating Successes

We experienced many successes along the way in carrying out this large-scale intervention, which demonstrated the effectiveness of our work. These successes were evident in the extensive feedback we got from educators and students, in addition to the quantitative gains seen across a variety of process indicators. Notably, African American students researched colleges and universities more frequently, and their participation in counseling sessions rose dramatically. These results demonstrated unequivocally the beneficial effects of our curriculum on the students' preparedness and goals for their post-secondary education and professions.

Furthermore, our work received a deeper level of validation from the students' input. Numerous individuals conveyed experiencing an enhanced sense of self-assurance and readiness for their futures, crediting this shift to the assistance and materials provided by our intervention. This response was especially satisfying since it demonstrated that the lives of these young people were being significantly improved by our efforts. It was proof that our method, which was painstakingly designed to meet the unique requirements and difficulties faced by African American high school students, was working.

Our initiative's successful results served to highlight the great worth of our community-engaged strategy. Through early and active involvement of industrial partners, educators, students, and community leaders, we were able to develop and execute solutions that were not only appropriate but also welcomed and supported by the community. In order to guarantee the longevity and effectiveness of our intervention, this inclusive and cooperative approach was essential. A major contributor to the program's success was the community's support and the student's needs, which showed how effective group effort can be in bringing about significant change.

In conclusion, our initiative's successes showed the major advantages of a customized, community-engaged strategy for improving African American high school graduates' preparedness for college or a career. The observable enhancements in process metrics, in conjunction with the sincere responses from the attendees, confirmed that our tactics were successful. These accomplishments served as a solid platform for subsequent initiatives as well as a ray of hope and an inspiration for other communities dealing with related difficulties. We were able to have a long-lasting effect on the lives and futures of many young people by cooperating, honoring the individual requirements of each of our pupils, and consistently modifying our tactics in response to feedback and results.

Navigating Unexpected Turns

We ran into unanticipated difficulties during our project when comments from some educators suggested they felt the program was a waste of their time. We reevaluated our strategy in response to this critical criticism, and we now place a greater focus on teacher professional development (PD). We quickly changed our approach to

include in-depth PD sessions after realizing the importance of educators in the effectiveness of our initiatives. This change gave us a chance to innovate and improve the way our program is delivered, even though at first it was intimidating because it required quick adaption and the creation of new material. We sought to address teachers' concerns and enhance their abilities to help children in an effective manner by emphasizing teacher empowerment through PD.

Enhanced PD sessions were first intended to be a stopgap solution to close the expectations of educators and our program's goals. But as time went on, these meetings showed to be a crucial component of our approach, yielding notable advantages for educators and learners alike. Teachers now have access to a greater variety of teaching styles, resources for student involvement, and methods for incorporating college and career readiness into their curricula thanks to these PD opportunities. The program's overall effectiveness and the kids' engagement were directly impacted by the educators' more dynamic and effective interactions with the students as a result of their expanded skill sets. These PD seminars were well received and had evident benefits, which made us decide to permanently incorporate them into our strategy.

Additionally, the PD sessions provided more adaptability and reach, meeting the various schedules and demands of educators. Through a range of delivery methods, such as self-paced courses, in-person seminars, and online webinars, we were able to offer instructors significant PD opportunities while also accommodating their busy schedules. This adaptability made sure that all educators could get the help and materials they needed to improve their teaching methods, no matter where they were or how much time

they had to spare. Consequently, our program's reach grew, enabling us to interact with a wider range of educators and, consequently, have a beneficial impact on a greater number of pupils.

The decision to change course and concentrate more on teacher PD turned a major obstacle into a competitive advantage for our program. In addition to addressing the original concerns voiced by a few instructors, the improved PD sessions resulted in a general improvement in the way college and career readiness were incorporated into the classroom. This change in approach improved the offers of our program and made it more inclusive, flexible, and successful. These PD workshops will continue to be a crucial part of our strategy, making sure that teachers have the tools they need to help their students succeed in their preparedness for college or career readiness. This experience has taught us the value of hearing what others have to say, making adjustments to suit the requirements of all parties involved, and never stopping looking for new and creative ways to accomplish goals.

Reflection and Learning

Thinking back on the process of putting our intervention into practice provides a thorough understanding of a complex event that includes obstacles, successes, and priceless insights. Throughout this trip, we needed to employ process measures. These metrics not only provided insight into the efficacy and scope of our endeavors but also functioned as a compass, directing our strategic choices. They made it possible for us to pinpoint both our areas of strength and where we needed to grow so that we could keep our actions in line with our major objectives. Our difficulties, which ranged from

logistical difficulties to the necessity of quick change in the face of teacher skepticism, highlighted how crucial it is to remain adaptable and to have open and transparent channels of communication. These challenges also demonstrated the resiliency and strength of our community, showing how cooperation and camaraderie can triumph even in the face of the most unanticipated events.

Our journey has been filled with major and encouraging triumphs that have laid a solid basis for future endeavors. These successes—in particular, the noticeable rise in African American high school graduates' preparedness for college or career readiness—attest to the efficacy of our customized, community-focused strategy. These results are not only benchmarks for our advancement but also point the way ahead, providing guidance and a model for imitation in analogous situations. These accomplishments highlight the transformative potential of committed, well-thought-out efforts to narrow educational gaps and promote fair opportunities for success.

This experience has been extremely instructive, highlighting the contribution that evidence-based, community-engaged solutions can make to the advancement of educational justice. The experience has served as a striking example of how focused interventions may bring about significant change when they are supported by strong stakeholder participation and are based on a thorough understanding of the needs of the community. The knowledge gained from both the setbacks and the victories experienced along the process is priceless, giving us a deeper comprehension of how to successfully negotiate the complexity of educational interventions.

We have a renewed feeling of hope and dedication to our goal as we look to the future. Equipped with the knowledge gained from this experience and encouraged by our accomplishments, we are better equipped than ever to carry out our mission of ensuring that every student, from whatever background, has the ability to access the resources and assistance they need to succeed after high school. Our experience has confirmed the value of flexibility, community involvement, and careful implementation of data in promoting advancement. Motivated by the conviction that education is a fundamental component of equity and empowerment, we will continue to be committed to improving our methodology and broadening our influence in the future.

Data Presentation

Introduction to the Survey

A thorough study including 257 third-year African American students and 36 teachers was carried out in an attempt to investigate methods for enhancing college and career readiness among African American students. See Table 2.1. The purpose of our study was to learn more about the perceptions and efficacy of the program intended to raise the proportion of African American high school graduates who graduate college or career ready. This program is a part of a larger educational effort to improve chances and equity, especially for children who have historically been underserved by the system. Utilizing this survey, educators and policymakers seek to pinpoint crucial domains for intervention, assistance, and enhancement that might have measurable impacts on students' academic and future career paths. It was intended that the information gathered would provide insightful viewpoints on how educational programs are currently doing,

emphasizing achievements, and identifying areas that require focus to create a more welcoming and encouraging learning environment.

Table 2.1

Survey Frequency Table

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	student	257	87.7	87.7	87.7
	teacher	36	12.3	12.3	100.0
	Total	293	100.0	100.0	

It was anticipated that the survey's results would provide insight into the perspectives and experiences of educators and students in relation to getting ready for success in postsecondary education. In particular, the student answers offered a glimpse into the ways African American students assess their preparedness for post-graduation aspirations and the tools and assistance now available to support them. However, teacher responses provided a professional viewpoint on the effectiveness of current curricula and the difficulties in preparing students for life beyond high school. When taken as a whole, these observations helped to create a more complex picture of African American students' academic experiences and helped shape focused tactics to improve their preparedness for college and career readiness. This survey's main objective was to gather information about how to close the gap between African American students' expectations and the realities they encounter in order to create more empowering and successful learning environments.

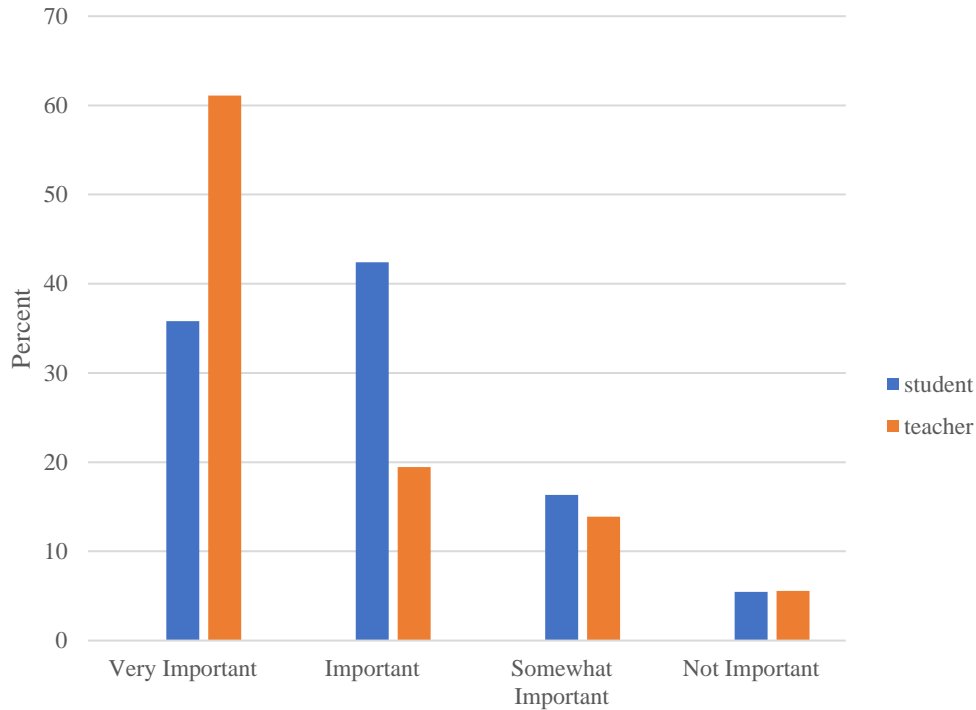
Consensus on College and Career Readiness (CCR)

The consensus on the importance of college and career readiness (CCR) among third-year African American students and their teachers is strikingly unanimous, highlighting a shared understanding of its critical role in future success. Almost 94% of students and an identical percentage of teachers agree that preparing for college and career paths is important at some level. See Figure 5.1. This agreement underscores the broad acknowledgment of the challenges and opportunities beyond high school, emphasizing the need for early preparation. The data reflects a collective awareness within the educational community about the significance of equipping students with the necessary skills, knowledge, and mindset to navigate the transition from secondary education to post-secondary achievements and professional life.

Figure 5.1

Graph: How Important is College and Career Readiness

How important do you think college and career readiness is for high school graduates?



This shared perspective between students and teachers strongly aligns with educational objectives, highlighting CCR as a foundational element of student development. It speaks to a shared vision of educational success in terms of academic achievement and preparation for life's following stages. For students, this recognition may stem from their aspirations and the realities of the competitive landscape they will face. At the same time, teachers likely see it from their experiences guiding students through these crucial developmental phases. Both groups' high importance on CCR indicates a readiness to engage with programs and initiatives that promise to enhance these readiness skills.

Educators and legislators are given a clear mandate to emphasize and fund activities that strengthen these ready competencies, given the widespread belief in the significance of CCR. The results are a powerful reminder of the vital role that educational institutions play in forming the workforce and civic population of the future. They emphasize the need for academically demanding courses that also provide ample opportunity for students to acquire the practical knowledge, critical thinking, and soft skills needed for both further education and the workforce.

The convergence of perceptions also implies that students and educators will probably support initiatives to increase CCR strongly, which will lay a strong foundation for the successful implementation of relevant programs. Initiatives to improve these areas can move forward with confidence since there is such broad consensus around the significance of CCR, knowing that they are meeting a common need. This agreement can serve as the impetus for group action, guaranteeing that tools, plans, and regulations are suitably coordinated to facilitate students' transfer from secondary school to the workforce.

The overwhelming consensus among third-year African American students and their teachers on the critical importance of college and career readiness highlights a shared commitment to future success. This unity underscores the urgency and necessity of comprehensive readiness programs responsive to the evolving demands of higher education and the labor market. As stakeholders navigate the complexities of educational planning and policymaking, the findings affirm the need for collaborative, forward-

thinking approaches to ensure that all students are equipped to thrive in their future academic and professional endeavors.

Accessibility and Implementation of the CCR Program

An overwhelming preference for inclusivity in educational possibilities was found in the replies to a survey given to third-year African American students about the accessibility of the College and Career Readiness (CCR) Program. Regardless of their intended careers, a resounding 87% of participants expressed the opinion that all students in grades 9 through 11 should be able to enroll in the CCR Program. See Figure 6.1. This agreement highlights a critical recognition of the program's potential advantages in helping students prepare for post-secondary careers.

Student opinions diverge as we delve deeper into how the CCR program should be implemented. About 41% of the respondents advocated making the CCR Program mandatory for all students. See Figure 6.1. This group likely perceives the program as an essential foundation that can equip students with critical skills and knowledge, preparing them for success in both college and career settings.

Conversely, a slightly larger segment of the student body, amounting to 46%, favored making the CCR Program an optional offering. This perspective suggests a desire for flexibility, allowing students to tailor their educational experiences based on individual interests, needs, and plans. The collective feedback from these third-year African American students presents a compelling case for broadening access to the CCR Program while also accommodating diverse student preferences in its implementation.

The perspective of teachers on the accessibility of the CCR Program to students in grades 9 through 11, irrespective of their future career paths, provides insightful feedback into the educational community's priorities. Around 66% of the educators surveyed supported the idea that the CCR Program should be accessible to all students, highlighting a solid belief in the program's potential to offer valuable skills and knowledge beneficial for future endeavors. See Figure 6.1. This consensus among teachers underscores an appreciation for comprehensive preparatory programs that cater to diverse student needs and aspirations.

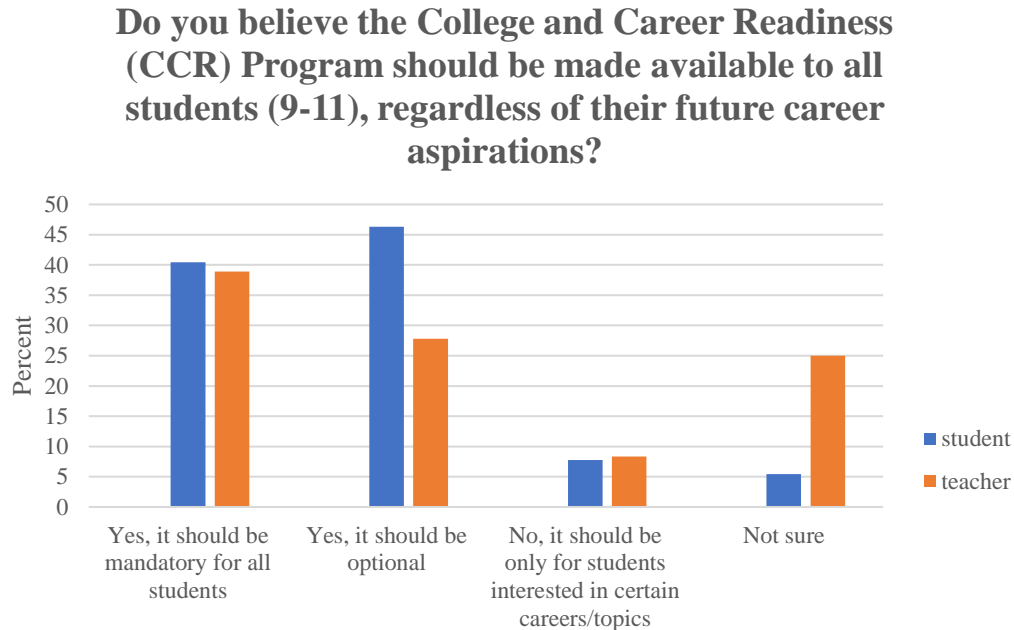
Teachers' perspectives differed when it came to the CCR Program's implementation details, indicating their diverse perspectives on the most effective ways to incorporate these programs into the current curriculum. A sizeable percentage of educators, as indicated by the 37% of questioned instructors who supported making the program mandatory for all students, seem to think highly of the fundamental skills taught in the CCR Program. This viewpoint places a strong emphasis on the need for organized training to ensure that students are prepared for the demands of both professions and post-secondary education.

On the other hand, according to 29% of the instructors, the CCR Program ought to be optional. See Figure 6.1. They supported more programming flexibility in schools, allowing students to select courses that best suited their interests and professional objectives. This point of view acknowledges the autonomy of the student as well as the significance of tailoring learning opportunities to increase relevance and engagement. In the end, the response from the teachers points to a shared desire to make the CCR

Program widely accessible while taking into account varying views on whether or not participation should be required.

Figure 6.1

Graph: Accessibility of the CCR Program



The goal of inclusive and flexible teaching methods is something that all third-year African American students and instructors in the CCR Program strive toward. Although there are differences in belief about the need for the CCR Program, most teachers and students agree that it is beneficial to make it available to all. This viewpoint shows how the program's promise to equip students with the skills and information they need for success in the future has been recognized by the larger educational community. The argument over whether the program should be required or optional highlights how challenging it is to find a middle ground between offering organized direction and

granting personal freedom and preference. All things considered, the feedback is in favor of a more nuanced approach to educational programming that honors the many needs, objectives, and preferences of the student body, creating the possibility of a more welcoming and adaptable learning environment.

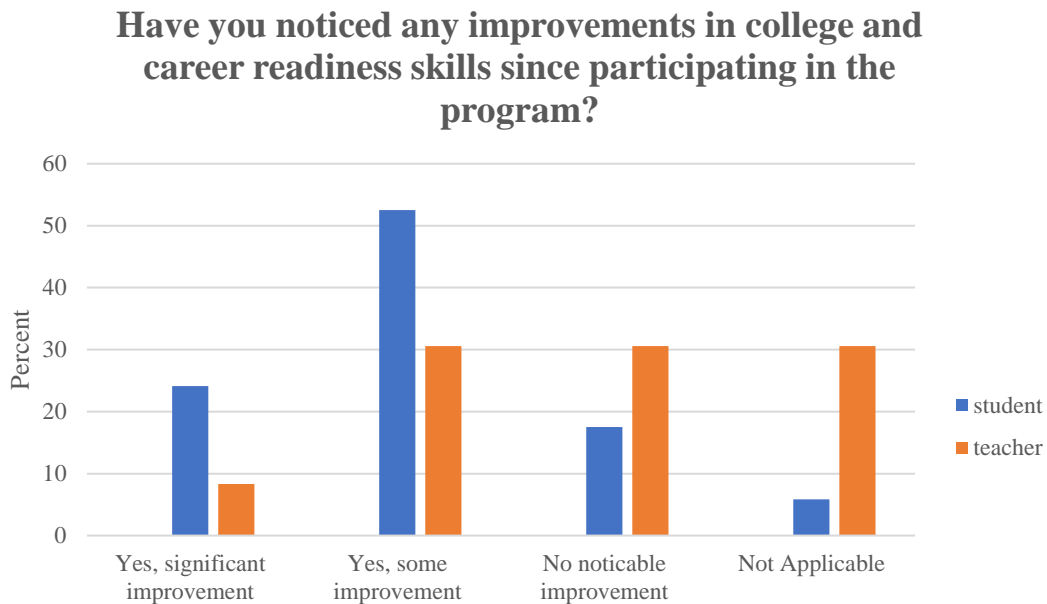
Diverging Views on CCR Program Implementation

Positive results regarding the program's impact are revealed by the viewpoints of third-year African American students on it, which aims to improve their college and career preparedness skills. About 77% of participants felt that their preparedness skills had improved as a result of the course. See Figure 7.1. These students demonstrated growth in crucial areas including time management, career planning, and academic preparation—all of which are necessary for success in both the workforce and post-secondary education. Their encouraging comments serve as a strong endorsement of the program's ability to meet the unique requirements of African American students, highlighting the significance of providing focused assistance and resources.

On the other hand, a small percentage of students—roughly 16%—reported that their skills were not improving despite taking part in the program. Their comments highlight the difficulties in attaining broad success with these kinds of programs, stressing the significance of continual evaluation and modification in order to successfully satisfy the needs of a variety of learners. These students' opinions are helpful in pinpointing areas where the program might need to be improved or given additional support in order to live up to its expectations for all participants.

Figure 7.1

Graph: CCR Noticeable Improvements



The overall feedback from the surveyed students underscores the critical role that tailored educational programs play in supporting African American students' college and career readiness. While the positive response from a significant majority highlights the program's potential to make a meaningful difference, the experiences of those who did not perceive improvements remind us of the complexities involved in educational interventions. This mixed feedback serves as a call to action for educators and program designers to continuously seek student input and use it to enhance the program's inclusivity and effectiveness, ensuring every student has the opportunity to succeed.

Teacher feedback paints a complex picture of a program's efficacy when it comes to improving students' preparedness for college and or career readiness. After taking part in the program, about 38% of the educators questioned said they had seen some

improvements in their students' preparation skills. It's possible that this set of educators saw shifts in areas like academic readiness, problem-solving skills, and self-management that are essential for success in postsecondary education. This implies that a certain percentage of students have profited from the program.

The results do, however, also point to some concerning areas. For example, over 32% of teachers said they have not noticed any changes in their students' preparedness for college or career readiness. According to this viewpoint, a sizable segment of the teaching staff doubts the program's effectiveness and raises the possibility of flaws in its conception, execution, or suitability for students' requirements. Program administrators who want to improve the curriculum and support services to better serve all students will find great value in receiving such input.

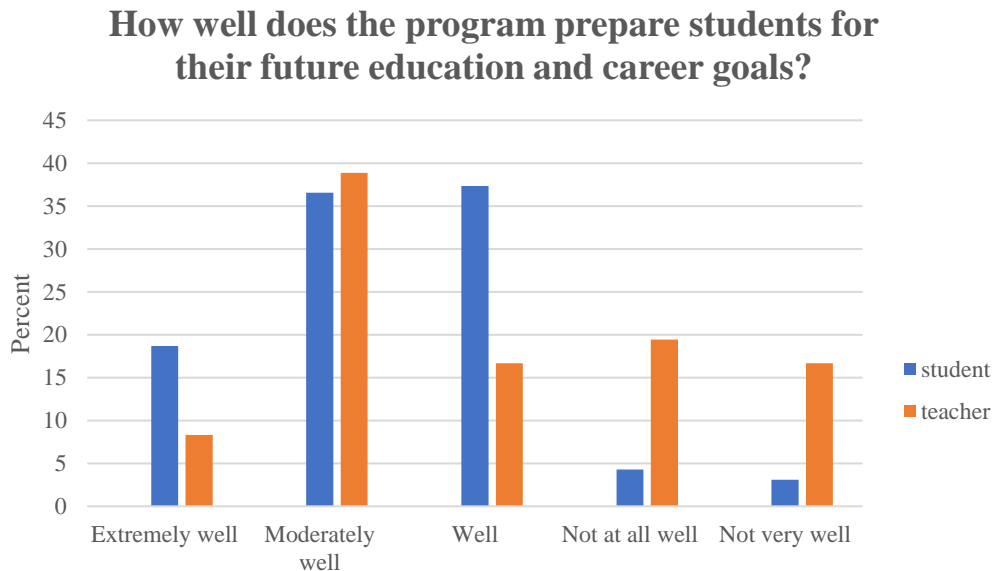
The conflicting comments highlight how difficult it is to address college and career readiness among a diverse student body and how difficult it is to design programs that cater to a variety of requirements. Although some members of the teaching staff report that the program has had favorable results, other staff members' reservations indicate that additional assessment and modification may be required. In conclusion, these results highlight the necessity of continual communication between instructors, program developers, and students in order to make sure that efforts to enhance preparedness are well-received by and beneficial to the intended beneficiaries, opening doors for their success in the future.

Impact of the CCR Program on Student Readiness

Third-year African American students have responded quite well to the curriculum that is meant to help them achieve their future academic and professional objectives. Remarkably, 92% of these students think the training has improved their preparedness for careers and post-secondary study at some level. See Figure 8.1. This high degree of satisfaction attests to the program's success in giving students the abilities, information, and self-assurance they need to follow their goals. The needs and goals of the students are well-matched with the curriculum, available materials, and available support. The students' answers highlight how the program might affect their achievement in the future and show that it's a useful first step on the way to reaching their long-term objectives.

Figure 8.1

Graph: CCR Program Effectiveness



Teachers' views of the program's effectiveness, however, are more variable, even if they are typically favorable. Approximately sixty-three percent of the instructors surveyed felt that the curriculum adequately prepares students for their future academic and professional aspirations. This percentage, however considerable, indicates a discrepancy in the perceptions of the program's efficacy between teachers and students. Even though they are aware of the program's advantages, teachers see areas for growth or have insights into problems that are not as apparent to students. To keep the curriculum evolving and successfully meet the needs of future cohorts of students, the teachers' feedback is crucial in choosing how to make improvements moving forward.

Teachers' and students' differing opinions on how beneficial the program is spark a discussion regarding expectations, the content of the program, and delivery strategies. It emphasizes how crucial it is to continuously evaluate and modify educational activities in order to better match student goals with real-world job readiness. To improve the program, pinpoint areas in which more support is required, and make sure that it stays relevant to the ever-evolving demands of college and career readiness, both groups' ongoing input is crucial.

This extensive input from educators and students provides a thorough picture of the program's advantages and disadvantages. The program is a crucial learning opportunity for kids, greatly increasing their confidence to take on problems in the future. To further improve the program's efficacy, teachers can use the feedback as a foundation for reflective practice and pedagogical modifications. For educational stakeholders

looking to maximize programs for college and career readiness, these viewpoints are priceless.

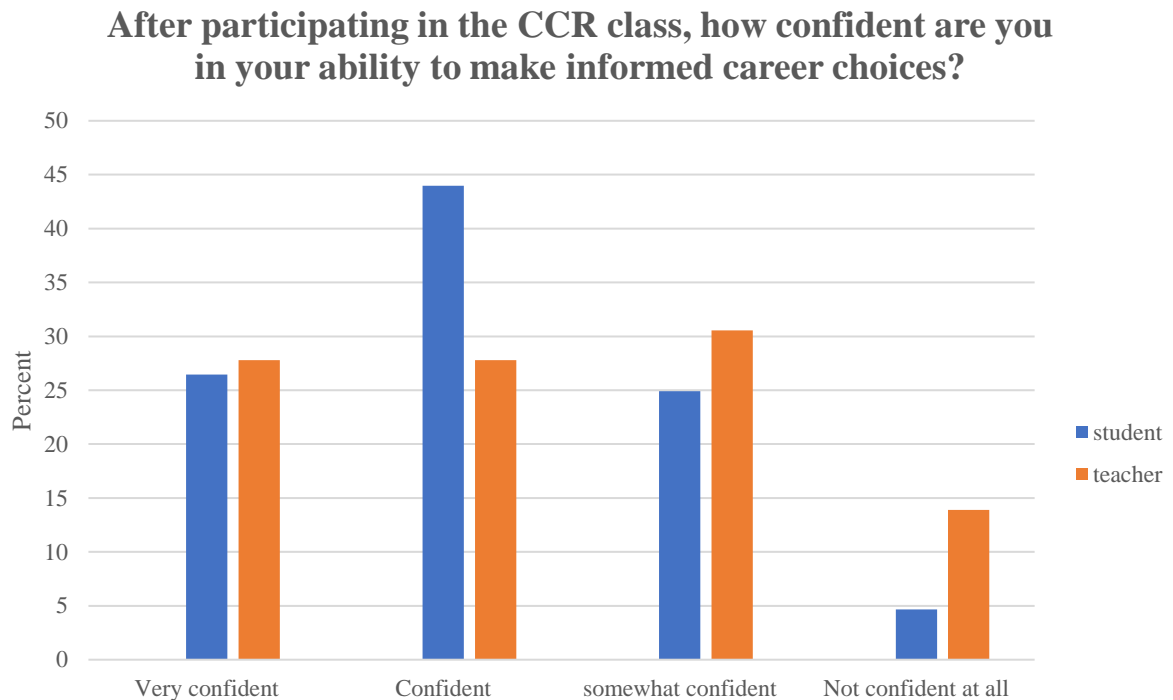
This reveals a positive overall impact of the program on preparing third-year African American students for their future endeavors, as seen through the eyes of most students and teachers. While the high student approval rating highlights the program's success from the learners' viewpoint, the teachers' feedback offers constructive insights for ongoing development. Bridging the perceptual gap between students and teachers will be crucial in making the program even more robust and responsive to the needs of all participants, ensuring it fully achieves its goal of preparing young individuals for the complexities of their future educational and career landscapes.

The Role of the CCR Program in Fostering Confidence

The College and Career Readiness (CCR) program has significantly increased the confidence of third-year African American students in their future college and career readiness. A resounding 95% of these students reported feeling confident in their capacity to make sensible professional judgments after participating in the CCR program. See Figure 9.1. This startling figure highlights how well the program provided students with the knowledge, skills, and self-assurance necessary to successfully navigate the difficult terrain of college and career planning and readiness. The CCR program's curriculum and activities successfully addressed students' needs and concerns while equipping them with the critical thinking and decision-making skills that will be essential for their future endeavors.

Figure 9.1

Graph: Student Confidence



In a similar disposition, students' self-evaluations and teachers' ratings of the program's influence on student confidence nearly match. Because of their involvement in the program, almost 86% of teachers reported that their pupils seemed more self-assured and equipped to make wise career decisions. See Figure 9.1. The agreement between the viewpoints of the students and the teachers confirms that the program has been successful in accomplishing its goals. Teachers are in a unique position to observe changes in students' confidence levels and overall preparedness for making decisions relating to their college and career readiness because they are deeply involved in their education and growth.

According to our research, African American students' educational journeys benefit greatly from the CCR program, which may help close the gaps in college and career readiness that many of them encounter. Students reported high levels of confidence are a reflection of the program's content and delivery, as well as its capacity to align with their personal and professional goals. This improved confidence is probably a result of the students being exposed to real-world scenarios, job exploration activities, advisement, and individualized assistance, which help them see a clear and reachable path for the future.

The results, however, also encourage stakeholders to consider the most appealing features of the program and how they might be improved upon or applied in different settings. Since the majority of instructors and students agree that the CCR program was beneficial, educational leaders are urged to think about how similar programs could be expanded or created in order to serve more students. Finding the essential elements that increase students' self-assurance and preparation for college and career readiness, decisions may help shape curriculum design and educational policy in the future.

The affirmative responses from African American third-year students and their instructors regarding the CCR program's contribution to enhancing self-assurance in making knowledgeable career decisions essentially highlight the program's significance and possible influence. Such high levels of assurance point to both the program's immediate success as well as the long-term advantages for students as they make the move from school to the workforce. Educational institutions may play a crucial role in educating students for successful and rewarding professions and consequently contribute

to larger societal and economic goals by continuing to fund and improve programs like CCR.

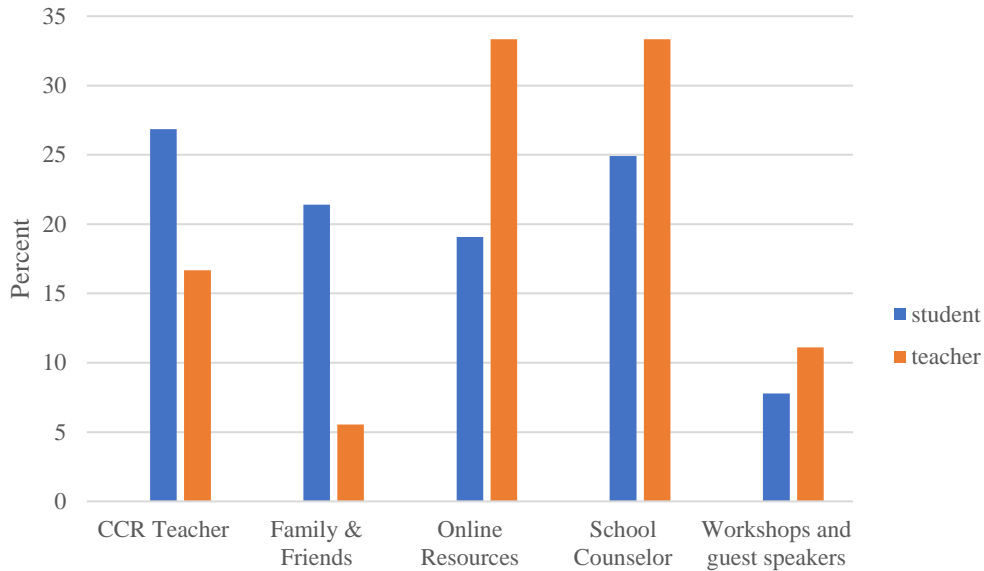
Key Resources for College and Career Readiness

The journey toward college and career readiness is paved with various resources, each crucial in guiding third-year African American students toward their future goals. According to the survey results, 28% of these students highlighted the mentoring and advisement provided by CCR teachers as the most beneficial resource. See Figure 10.1. This preference underscores the value of personalized guidance and the positive impact of mentors directly involved in the student's educational and PD processes. Such mentoring relationships offer tailored advice and foster a supportive environment that encourages students to explore their aspirations and navigate challenges.

Figure 10.1

Graph: Helpful Resources

What resources have you found most helpful for college and career guidance?



About 25% of students cited school counselors' advice as a crucial resource for their college and career readiness, in addition to the mentorship provided by CCR teachers. See Figure 10.1. The counselors' wide viewpoint, along with their experience in job alternatives and educational pathways, enhances the more specialized help provided by CCR teachers. The vital function that counseling services play in schools is highlighted by the fact that school counselors play a key part in assisting students in understanding their alternatives, setting reasonable objectives, and creating plans to accomplish them.

Remarkably, twenty-three percent of the students said that online courses and seminars were very good at guiding them toward college and career readiness. This illustrates how digital resources, which provide easily available and varied instruments

for learning and discovery, are becoming increasingly important in today's educational environment. A plethora of information and interactive experiences that are essential for helping students create their understanding of potential career routes and the prerequisites for different post-secondary education programs can be found on online platforms.

Students' varied choices for resources indicate that it is best to pursue college and career readiness from multiple angles. Through the integration of digital technologies, professional counseling, and one-on-one mentoring, educational institutions may provide a holistic support system that accommodates the diverse requirements and preferences of their students. This combination of resources makes sure that students have access to the wide range of possibilities for self-directed learning and individualized coaching that they need to make well-informed decisions to become college and career ready.

It becomes clear that the effectiveness of college and career readiness support lies not in a single resource but in a comprehensive suite that includes personalized mentorship, professional advisement, and digital learning tools. This blend has proven beneficial for third-year African American students, with about 75% affirming that the array of resources available through the program has been helpful in their preparation journey. Such a multifaceted approach was tailored to meet student's diverse learning styles and needs, ensuring they have the necessary tools and guidance to explore and plan their future. It mirrors the dynamic nature of today's educational environment, continually adapting to meet the changing demands of career and college readiness. As educational stakeholders work to enhance and broaden these resources, they aim to equip students with the comprehensive knowledge, skills, and support they need to confidently forge

their paths to success, reaffirming the program's commitment to fostering an inclusive and supportive learning landscape.

To gauge the effectiveness of resources for college and career guidance, teachers shared valuable insights into the tools and strategies that have proven most beneficial in supporting students' journey toward future readiness. About 14% of the teachers underscored the significance of mentoring and advisement provided by CCR teachers. See Figure 10.1. This group of educators highlighted the importance of personalized support and guidance from CCR teachers, reflecting a belief in the power of tailored mentorship to address each student's unique needs and aspirations. The mentorship from CCR teachers is seen not just as a resource but as a vital connection that empowers students with the confidence and direction needed for their future paths.

Furthermore, according to 34% of educators, school counselor advice is the most beneficial tool for helping students make decisions about their college and careers. See Figure 10.1. This enthusiastic support for school counselors' work demonstrates the wide range of services they provide, including help with college applications, job exploration, and academic assistance. School counselors are highly esteemed due to their extensive comprehension of the educational system and their capacity to guide students through the intricacies of becoming college or career ready by high school graduation. Their knowledge is seen to be crucial in assisting students in making decisions that are consistent with their long-term objectives.

The majority of educators—46 percent—cited online resources and courseware as the greatest resources for guidance in college and career readiness. See Figure 10.1. This

selection demonstrates how crucial digital platforms are becoming for providing students with easy access to a wealth of engaging, practical, and readily available data, and tools. One excellent technique to learn and discover oneself is through online resources. They can be used to investigate a variety of hobbies and get a better understanding of possible career paths. The emphasis on digital tools signals a shift in the way that technology is being used to help kids get college and career ready while preparing for the future.

Remarkably, 94 percent of educators said that the program's tools assisted in getting students ready for their desired careers and college experiences. This almost uniform consensus among educators highlights how well the program's all-encompassing guidance strategy is thought to work. It displays a common trust in the range of services offered, including cutting-edge virtual learning opportunities one-on-one mentorship, and expert advice. According to the educators' assessment, the program has been successful in giving students the abilities, information, and self-assurance they need to become college or career ready and their future pursuits.

The teachers' aggregate opinion presents a picture of a comprehensive and multidimensional program that successfully addresses the various needs of students' college and career readiness. The range of beneficial tools available—from individualized coaching and mentoring to the extensive reach of online courseware—showcases the significance of a thorough plan in assisting students on their path to success. The program's approach to guidance stands out as a model for equipping students to navigate their futures with confidence and competence, especially if instructors continue to fight for and use these tools. Teachers' agreement on this point

supports the program's present approaches and offers a solid base for further improvement and development.

Lastly, about 20% of participants found guest speakers and industry experts among the program's most beneficial elements. See Figure 11.1. This exposure to real-world professionals and their insights into various fields provides students with inspiration, practical advice, and networking opportunities. Hearing directly from those actively working in different sectors helps to ground students' career exploration and skill-building efforts in the job market realities, enhancing the relevance and impact of the program's other components. Together, these findings highlight a multifaceted approach to college and career readiness that comprehensively addresses students' academic, professional, and personal development needs.

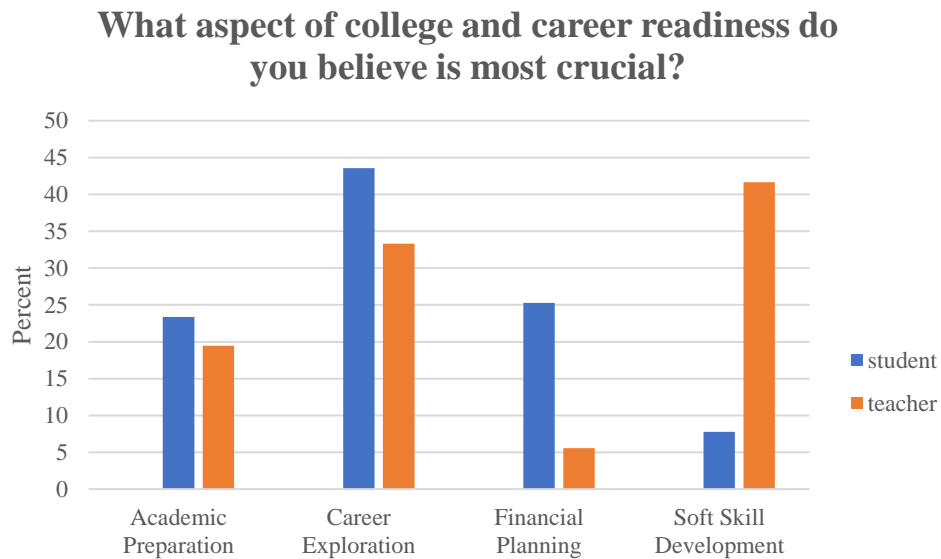
The synergy of personalized mentorship, expert advisement, and expansive online resources forms the cornerstone of effective college and career readiness programs, as evidenced by the strong endorsements from third-year African American students and their teachers. This collaborative approach not only meets students' diverse needs and preferences but also aligns with the dynamic requirements of the modern educational landscape. The overwhelmingly positive feedback, with significant portions of students and a near-unanimous consensus among teachers, reaffirms the importance of a comprehensive support system. Such a system empowers students with the knowledge, skills, and confidence needed to pursue their future goals confidently, showcasing the program's commitment to fostering an inclusive and supportive learning environment.

Key Components of Effective CCR Programs

The feedback from teachers and third-year African American students on a comprehensive program designed to enhance college and career readiness sheds light on the key elements contributing to its effectiveness. Approximately 42% of the respondents (20% of the students and 22% of the teachers) identified academic preparation as one of the most beneficial aspects of the program. See Figure 11.1. This emphasis on academic readiness underscores the importance of foundational knowledge and critical thinking skills for success in higher education and beyond. The focus on academic preparation reflects an understanding that solid educational foundations enable students to pursue ambitious post-secondary and career goals confidently.

Figure 11.1

Graph: Beneficial Aspects of CCR



Career exploration emerged as the most highlighted feature of the program, with about 77% of participants pointing to it as a critical component of their development. See

Figure 11.1. This aspect of the program allows students to investigate various career paths, understand the qualifications needed for different fields, and envision possible futures for themselves. The program facilitates informed decision-making by providing students with a broad spectrum of possibilities. It fosters a sense of empowerment among students as they consider their potential place in the workforce. Career exploration bridges students' current educational experiences and future professional lives, making it a critical factor in the program's success.

Furthermore, skill development was highlighted as a critical program advantage in 50% of the input. Students are better prepared for the variety of obstacles they will encounter in college and career readiness by this emphasis on the development of transferable, real-world skills including cooperation, communication, and problem-solving. See Figure 11.1. Building skills is essential to preparing students for the realities of the working world and giving them the tools they need to adapt to and succeed in a variety of settings. The focus on this element suggests a thorough strategy for preparedness that targets each student's entire development in addition to academic success.

About 30% of the respondents identified the availability of financial planning and advising as a key benefit. See Figure 11.1. With the support of this individualized guidance, students may successfully negotiate the challenges of financial aid, career planning, and college applications. Such assistance is crucial in helping students who might not have the means or expertise to independently investigate these possibilities to better understand post-secondary education and career pathways. Advice on colleges and

careers makes sure that students know what opportunities are available to them and are prepared to take advantage of them.

The perspectives acquired from educators and third-year African American students highlighted the program's multidimensionality and showed a thorough and effective approach to college and career readiness. By emphasizing academic readiness, job exploration, skill development, advice, and guest speakers, the program caters to the many needs and goals of its members. This all-encompassing approach gives students the information and abilities they need to succeed and gives them the confidence to make wise decisions about their futures. Students' and teachers' high regard for these curriculum components highlights the value of a diverse strategy in preparing students for the challenges of post-secondary education and the workforce. In the end, this evaluation emphasizes how well the program has done at creating a nurturing and stimulating atmosphere that promotes student development and readiness for upcoming chances and challenges.

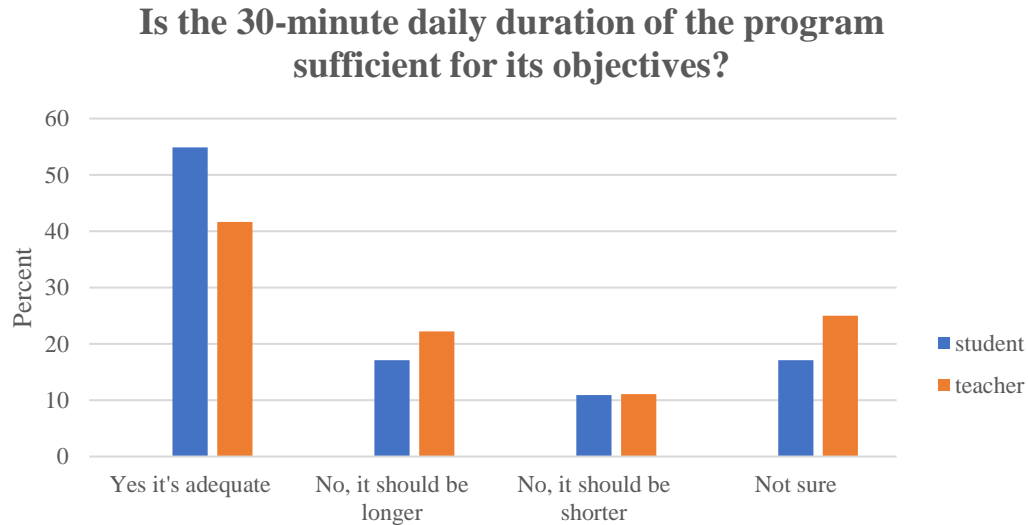
Assessing Optimal Duration of CCR Program

Exciting new insights on the efficacy of a 30-minute daily program for college and career readiness came from the opinions of teachers and third-year African American students. Fifty-five percent of the students think that the time allotted now is enough to accomplish the program's goals, indicating that the sessions' condensed, targeted format fits well with their needs and learning preferences. See Figure 12.1. To a lesser extent, 43% of teachers agree, believing that the duration aligns with the program's objectives. A sizable percentage of teachers and students concur, demonstrating a general satisfaction

with the program's design and its capacity to provide worthwhile content in a condensed amount of time.

Figure 12.1

Graph: CCR Allotted Time Adequacy



Conversely, a notable minority of participants, comprising 20% of teachers and 18% of third-year African American students, advocated for extending the program's duration. This group likely perceives the complexity and breadth of college and career readiness topics as warranting more time for thorough exploration and discussion. Their stance suggests a desire for deeper engagement and more expansive coverage of the curriculum, pointing to areas where the program could potentially enhance its impact through extended sessions.

Interestingly, 11% of respondents from both categories (students and teachers) think the program should run shorter. This is a smaller minority. This viewpoint could

result from worries about the level of daily dedication or the effectiveness of material delivery in the allotted time. Those who favor a shorter course length may advocate for a more concentrated or streamlined approach, arguing that by compressing the content, efficiency and student engagement could be increased.

The disagreements over the ideal program length highlight how difficult it is to strike a balance between efficacy and engagement while maintaining program depth in a constrained amount of time. The majority's assessment that the program's present duration is sufficient attests to its effectiveness in achieving its goals. The diverse answers do, however, also point to areas that could want more improvement, for example, by providing extra sessions for students who want to study a particular subject in greater detail or by creating modular designs that adapt to various learning styles.

When these viewpoints are combined, it is evident that there is still a need for modification even if teachers and students generally agree that the 30-minute daily program duration for college and career preparedness is appropriate. The program's success might be increased even more by adjusting its duration to better suit the varied needs and preferences of its participants. In order to evolve the program to maximize its benefits and ensure that it continues to be an invaluable tool in preparing students for their future academic and professional activities, it will be essential to comprehend and address these divergent points of view.

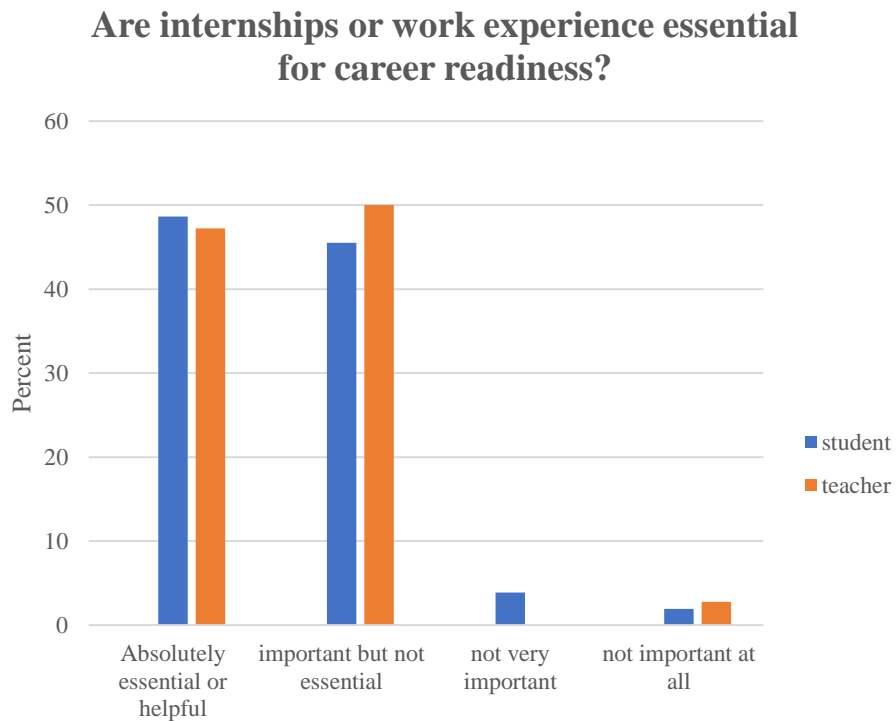
Essential Skills for Post-Secondary Success

The discussion surrounding the significance of internships or work experience in the CCR program reveals a strong consensus among teachers and third-year African

American students on its importance. Although the current program did not include actual internships due to its duration, the topic was incorporated into the curriculum, emphasizing the value of practical experience in preparing for the workforce. An overwhelming 97% of teachers and 94% of students agreed that including internships or work experiences is crucial in a comprehensive career readiness strategy. See Figure 13.1. This nearly unanimous perspective underscores the widespread recognition of hands-on experience as a critical component in bridging the gap between academic learning and real-world application.

Figure 13.1

Graph: Significance of Internships or Work Experience



Examining the importance of these experiences in more detail, 47% of educators and 49% of students specifically identified internships as critical to career preparedness. See Figure 13.1. This suggests a strong conviction that students cannot be adequately prepared for the challenges of the profession by theoretical knowledge alone. Proponents of internships' crucial status probably consider them as priceless chances for students to learn about their chosen fields, hone their professional abilities, and create vital networks for future career advancement.

The high regard that both educators and students have for internships suggests that they both recognize the dynamic character of career preparation in the current economic climate. It implies an understanding that practical experiences that promote flexibility, problem-solving abilities, and professional decorum are necessary to supplement academic accomplishments. This acknowledgment is in line with a larger trend in education toward experiential learning, in which students are urged to use what they have learned in real-world situations to improve their employability and job opportunities.

The conversation has underscored a notable deficiency in the present range of program offerings, indicating an opportunity for expansion and enhancement. There is a pronounced demand among stakeholders for the integration of internships or practical work experiences. This suggests that there is considerable potential for improvement in how career readiness programs equip students for professional environments. By upgrading the program to include easy access to internships, students can gain the

practical experience essential for a smooth transition from their educational paths to successful employment.

The feedback from teachers and third-year African American students emphatically supports the integration of internships and work experiences into the CCR program. The consensus on the importance of practical experience, with a significant portion considering it essential, indicates a clear direction for future program enhancements. By addressing this gap and providing opportunities for real-world application, educational institutions can better equip students with the comprehensive skill set required to navigate the complexities of the modern job market.

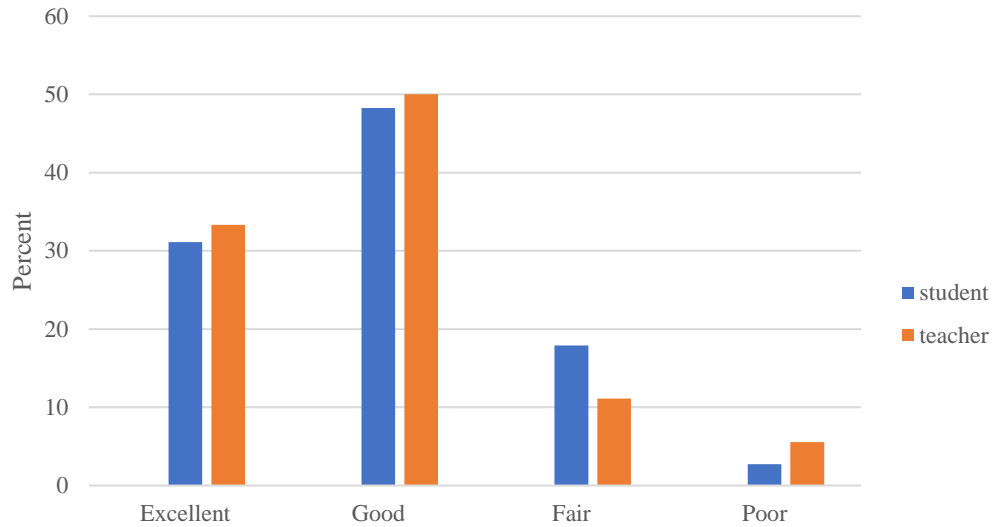
Diversity and Inclusivity in the CCR Program

Third-year African American students' evaluations of a program designed to improve their college and career readiness are overwhelmingly positive. Regarding race and ethnicity, a sizable majority of teachers (83%), as well as students (79%), thought the program's approach to diversity and inclusivity was excellent or good. See Figure 14.1. The program's high level of acceptance shows that it successfully represents and takes into account the needs and viewpoints of a diverse student body. The program's dedication to fostering an atmosphere where all participants feel heard, seen, and respected is emphasized by such a strong recommendation, highlighting the significance of diversity and inclusivity in educational environments.

Figure 14.1

Graph: Diversity and Inclusivity

How would you rate the diversity and inclusivity of the program in terms of race and ethnicity?



Even though the reaction was mostly positive, about 3% of teachers and students showed displeasure by giving the program's diversity and inclusivity a bad rating. This sparse input indicates that there is still an opportunity for development to guarantee that each participant's demands are met by the program. It serves as a reminder that to address all viewpoints and experiences within a varied educational community, inclusion measures must be continuously assessed and modified.

The program's achievement in fostering an inclusive environment is partly responsible for its effectiveness in preparing students for upcoming college and career readiness. Within its framework, the curriculum acknowledges and celebrates variety, which greatly enhances the educational experience. This method not only equips students to succeed in a multicultural, international workforce but also fosters a multicultural viewpoint, which is becoming more and more valuable. The emphasis on inclusivity is

essential for developing participants' empathy, comprehension, and teamwork abilities. These abilities are crucial for improving student success and navigating post-secondary contexts, making sure they are ready for the chances and difficulties that lie ahead.

The input underscores how important it is to have ongoing conversations and strong feedback systems in order to find and fix any issues with diversity and inclusivity in the program. Gaining important insights from actively connecting with teachers and students to understand their experiences and opinions is recommended. These observations may be used to guide program adaptations aimed at better serving the varied demands of the viewership. Maintaining the program's relevance and efficacy requires establishing an ongoing improvement process, especially considering the increasingly diversified educational context. This dedication to ongoing improvement guarantees that the program not only satisfies present requirements but also foresees and adjusts to new opportunities and difficulties in the future.

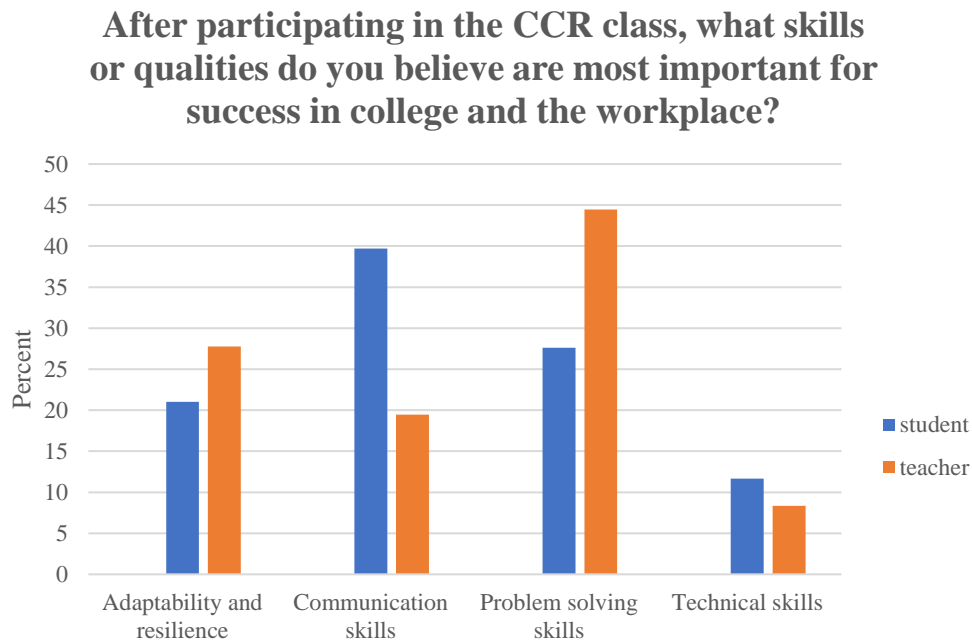
The feedback from teachers and third-year African American students predominantly affirms the program's effectiveness in promoting diversity and inclusivity, a testament to its comprehensive and thoughtful design. The program's contribution to fostering an encouraging and empowered learning environment is highlighted by the overwhelmingly favorable response, even while the little critique emphasizes the necessity of continued efforts to improve inclusivity. Incorporating diverse voices and perspectives will continue to be essential in refining the program, ensuring it remains a dynamic and inclusive platform for all students' growth and development.

Skills and Qualities for Future Success

After participating in the CCR course, third-year African American students and their instructors' viewpoints on the qualities thought necessary for future success in college and career readiness provided a thorough understanding of the qualities. 21% of students and 27% of teachers emphasized resilience and adaptability, highlighting the significance of adjusting to changes and overcoming obstacles. This focus on resilience and flexibility is a reflection of the understanding that academic and professional settings are unpredictable and that people need to be ready to change with the times and overcome obstacles head-on.

Figure 15.1

Graph: Qualities for Future Success



Another important aspect that stood out was communication skills, where opinions varied significantly: 40% of students and 19% of teachers said that having these

skills was essential for success. This discrepancy may indicate that students value the capacity for clear and effective concept expression more than other students because they are maybe more conscious of the social and collaborative components of both educational and professional environments. Effective communication is vital for collaboration, networking, and establishing connections. It is also necessary for scholastic achievement and professional progress.

Problem-solving abilities were highly regarded; according to 28% of students and 44% of teachers, they were essential. See Figure 15.1. This focus on problem-solving abilities emphasizes how important it is for people to think critically and creatively in order to face problems and come up with workable solutions. Instructors in particular may highlight the practical applications of these abilities and their significance for students' future success in handling challenging situations in both their personal and professional life.

A smaller percentage of participants—12% of students and 8% of teachers—felt that technical abilities were essential. This comparatively lesser emphasis might be a reflection of the widespread belief that, although technical abilities are important, they are somewhat more specialized to particular professional paths than they are to all careers. Recognizing their importance nevertheless emphasizes how technology is becoming more and more prevalent in all spheres of life and how important it is to have a basic level of technical proficiency and digital literacy. See Figure 15.1.

When these comments are combined, it's clear that a diverse skill set—including technical proficiency, problem-solving, communication, and adaptability—is necessary

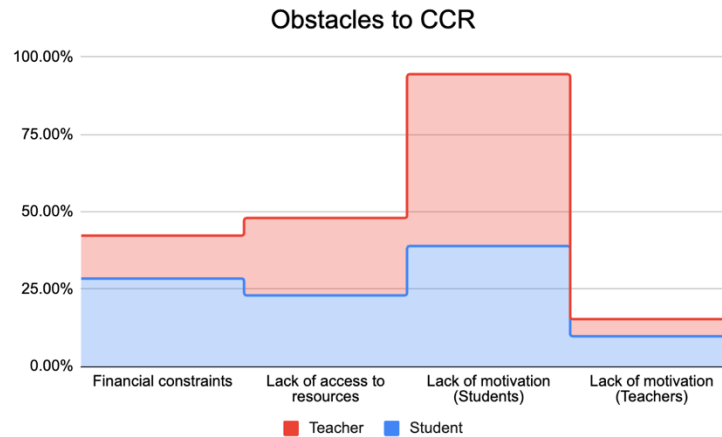
for success in college and career readiness. Different viewpoints on the difficulties encountered in post-secondary education and the job are revealed by the differences in emphasis placed on these abilities by teachers and students. When taken as a whole, these observations highlight the value of a well-rounded education that equips students with the specialized knowledge required for their chosen fields as well as the soft skills and resilience required to prosper in a world that is always changing.

Barriers to College and Career Readiness

According to our recent study conducted with teachers and third-year African American students, there are several challenges to college and career readiness. One major obstacle mentioned was money, which 28% of students and 14% of teachers said was tough. See Figure 16.1. This discrepancy implies that students experience the weight of financial difficulties more acutely, which may affect their capacity to enroll in programs for career training or further education. Financial constraints can prevent people from accessing extracurricular activities and resources that are essential for holistic development, in addition to limiting their options for higher education.

Figure 16.1

Graph: Obstacles to College and Career Readiness



Another critical challenge identified is the lack of access to resources, with 23% of students and a slightly higher 25% of teachers recognizing it as a significant obstacle. See Figure 16.1. This concern points to disparities in educational materials, technology, and support services, essential for effective learning and preparation for future careers. The alignment in perception between students and teachers on this issue highlights a consensus on the need for equitable resource distribution. Ensuring all students have access to quality learning tools and guidance is fundamental to overcoming college and career readiness barriers.

The biggest obstacle was thought to be students' lack of motivation, which was mentioned by 39% of students and an even larger 55% of teachers. See Figure 16.1. This discrepancy between what students and teachers believe might be an indication of a larger issue with student involvement and what motivates students to succeed. The complicated topic of motivation is impacted by a wide range of elements, such as one's own hobbies, scholastic difficulties, and surroundings. A multidimensional strategy is

needed to address this problem, with the goal of motivating and involving students through pertinent, real-world applications of their learning.

Remarkably, a survey indicated that a relatively small portion of respondents—10% of students and 6% of teachers—believe that teacher motivation poses a serious obstacle to learning. See Figure 16.1. It is important to recognize the value of instructors' passion and effort even in light of these low numbers. Compared to student motivation, teacher motivation is mentioned as an issue less often, while being equally important in determining the nature of the educational process. Instructors play a crucial role in creating a supportive learning environment because of their passion, which positively affects students' attitudes toward studying and shapes their professional goals. Consequently, funding for PD and enough teacher support are necessary to foster a positive and inspiring environment in schools. The improvement of the learning environment is facilitated by this investment, which eventually increases student performance and engagement.

These findings illustrate the multifaceted challenges students face on their journey to becoming college and career ready. Financial constraints and limited access to resources create external barriers, while motivational issues, both personal and observed in educators, represent internal challenges. Addressing these obstacles requires a holistic strategy that provides financial and material support and fosters an engaging and motivating learning environment.

Scholarship programs, improved access to educational technologies, and projects aimed at bridging education with practical career opportunities are a few potential ways

to lessen these obstacles. Establishing a community of support that fosters academic endurance and resilience can aid students in overcoming obstacles related to motivation. Getting students involved in job exploration activities that emphasize how their education may be applied in the real world may help increase their dedication and motivation.

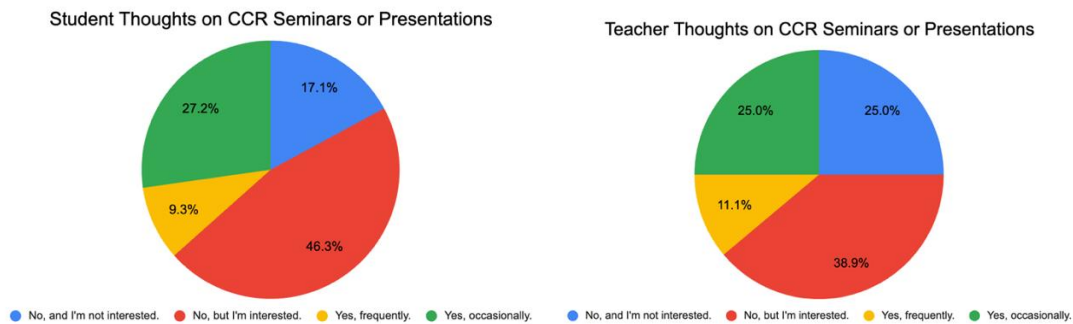
There are both concrete and abstract obstacles in the way of becoming college or career ready for African American students. Creating efficient support systems requires an understanding of these challenges and how to solve them from the viewpoints of both teachers and students. By addressing financial barriers, improving resource accessibility, and fostering a culture of drive and involvement, educators can set the stage for a time when every kid is prepared to fulfill their college and career goals. Working together, communities, schools, and government organizations can create an educational environment where all students can achieve success.

Attendance and Interest in Presentations or Seminars

A survey investigating college and career readiness unveiled telling responses from third-year African American students and their teachers. It revealed that 46% of students and 39% of teachers were interested in attending readiness presentations from local businesses and colleges yet had not done so. See Figure 17.1. This gap indicated a disconnect between the availability of such presentations and the awareness among students and educators. The disparity suggests that students are likely more willing to participate than educators are aware of, pointing to a potential oversight in communication or program accessibility.

Figure 17.1

Graph: Student Participation in Seminars or Presentations



Conversely, only a minority of students (9%) and teachers (11%) reported regular attendance at these events. This engagement contrasts sharply with the large segment that showed interest without participation. The higher teacher response rate might suggest an overestimation of student attendance or misalignment in recognizing student involvement in such activities. Furthermore, 27% of students and 25% of teachers indicated they only occasionally attended such workshops and seminars. This infrequent engagement suggests more consistent participation is necessary to benefit fully from these readiness initiatives. Sporadic attendance could imply barriers like scheduling conflicts, limited access, or variable student motivation, which are areas ripe for improvement. See Figure 17.1.

Significantly, a portion of the survey's participants, 17% of students and 25% of teachers identified as neither attending nor interested in readiness events. This apathy towards participation underscores a troubling disengagement from college and career readiness resources. The higher teacher perception of student disinterest compared to student self-reporting warrants an investigation into the causes of this disconnect. The survey's findings stressed the need for a deeper understanding of the varying degrees of

engagement with college and career readiness events. Identifying the reasons behind the absence of participation is critical to developing more inclusive and appealing educational programs. With such insights, academic leaders can enhance student engagement in beneficial readiness activities.

It was clear that improving communication about the availability and benefits of readiness presentations is essential. Promoting regular attendance and participation could significantly bolster students' preparation for future academic and professional pursuits. The survey indicated a clear opportunity to convert expressed interest into concrete attendance, highlighting the need for targeted outreach and engagement strategies.

In summary, the survey underscored the importance of reevaluating the delivery of college and career readiness programs. Addressing the barriers that prevent interested students from attending presentations and seminars is critical. Through strategic adjustments, educators can ensure that readiness programs effectively prepare students for the demands of their forthcoming educational and career journeys.

Progress in CCR: Insights from South Carolina

In the spring of their junior year, high school students across South Carolina face a pivotal moment that could shape their future paths. They take standardized tests like the SAT, ACT, and WIN assessments to gauge their readiness for college challenges and workforce demands. These assessments served as critical indicators, helping students understand their strengths and areas for improvement while providing schools with data to tailor support and resources. In the Spring of 2023 (class of 2024), the results of these assessments painted a concerning picture for African American students, revealing deep-

seated disparities in educational outcomes. Approximately 65% of African American juniors were found to be neither college nor career ready, indicating significant gaps in their preparation for post-secondary success. See Figure 18.1.

Figure 18.1

Graph: CCR Percentages in 2023

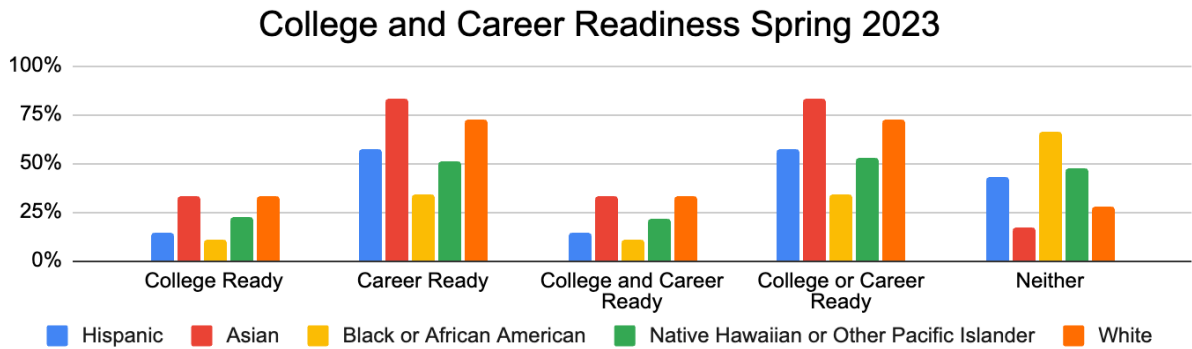
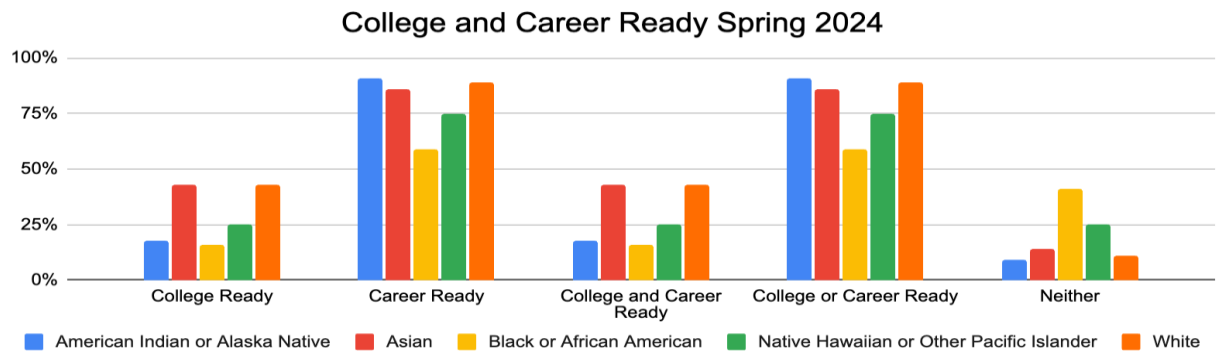


Figure 18.2

Graph: CCR Percentages in 2024



This startling figure acted as a wake-up call for educators, causing them to reevaluate the tactics and resources available to African American children. It brought to light the necessity of a more all-encompassing approach to education that incorporates learning opportunities and real-world experiences in addition to standardized testing.

Many students have not yet taken part in vital activities that could improve their college and career readiness, such as internships, ASVAB testing, or dual enrollment programs, despite efforts to resolve these discrepancies. These courses are vital because they provide hands-on experience and enhance knowledge of many job paths. Students will have access to these options in their final year of high school.

Schools adopted focused interventions to boost engagement and participation in these crucial preparedness activities in response to the issues raised by the data. In order to adequately prepare students for the intricacies of the real world, efforts were undertaken to close the knowledge gap between academic preparation and real-world experience. These targeted initiatives paid off, as the class of 2025 demonstrated growth. In the Spring of 2024, the proportion of African American students who were unprepared for college or the workforce fell to roughly 41%, which is a notable improvement from the previous year. See Figure 18.2.

There was over 20% increase in the number of students who will graduate from high school, college or career ready. This notable increase suggests that more high school graduates now possess the abilities and know-how needed for their next steps, including going to college or starting a career. The enhancement demonstrates the efficacy of new educational approaches and materials designed to get students ready for success in postsecondary education. The school curriculum and programs to help students improve their capacity for critical thought, problem-solving, and vocational training proved successful. Because of this, a higher percentage of students are becoming prepared for the chances and difficulties that come after high school.

Although this was a positive move, it also brought attention to the continued challenges African American students have in achieving educational equity. The data indicates that a significant portion of the student body requires additional instruction to prepare them for the demands of college and career readiness. This ongoing issue necessitates focused efforts to eliminate the institutional barriers keeping students from realizing their academic potential and to establish an environment where every student can thrive. Understanding how crucial it is for students to have a diversity of experiences has led to schools putting more effort into providing students with opportunities for real-world learning. Giving students the skills they need to successfully navigate the demands of both higher education and the workforce requires these experiences.

The advancements achieved by the 2025 class demonstrated the value of a comprehensive approach to education as well as the possible effects of focused interventions. It brought attention to the necessity of ongoing funding and support for initiatives that provide academic enrichment, mentorship, and real-world experiences. Though encouraging, these initiatives additionally highlighted the necessity of constant observation and modification to guarantee that every student has access to the tools and assistance they require for success. The data from these two student classes represented significant turning points in the ongoing pursuit of educational justice by illuminating the potential and difficulties associated with educating African American students for success in college and career readiness.

After considering these results, it became evident that even though there had been improvement, there was still a lot of work to be done. The differences between African

American students' college and career readiness was a sign of larger injustices in the educational system. A comprehensive approach that increases access to high-quality education provides strong support networks and fosters inclusive cultures that value and celebrate diversity is needed to address these issues. Future efforts to achieve these goals were surely informed by the lessons acquired from the experiences of the classes of 2024 and 2025, as educators and communities continued to work towards them.

The information regarding African American students' college and career readiness both acted as a call to action and a reminder of each student's potential. It emphasized how crucial it is to have faith in every student's potential to succeed given the correct circumstances and assistance. The experiences of the 2024 and 2025 classes demonstrated the transformational potential of education and its vital role in determining the futures of both individuals and societies.

These students' experiences offer a penetrating look at the status of education today, but they also offer hope for the future as society develops. This incident serves as further evidence that we can overcome the challenges facing our educational institutions by working together, being persistent, and maintaining our commitment to equity. While there are still many obstacles to overcome before every student is fully equipped to meet the demands of both college and career readiness, the progress we've accomplished so far has established a strong basis for future advancements. This foundation strengthens the potential for educational change and increased student readiness by providing us with both motivation and a framework for tackling the remaining problems.

Conclusion and Call to Action

Notwithstanding varying degrees of engagement, the data clearly shows that most students are interested in the college and career readiness program. The demonstrated interest indicates a great potential for raising engagement by focused outreach and removing obstacles to participation, especially among individuals who have not yet attended such activities. Different techniques are needed to improve college and career readiness, as evidenced by the differences in interest and attendance levels. Techniques that take into account the unique circumstances of each student, like flexible scheduling, a wide range of program options, and improved communication regarding the advantages and accessibility of programs, could close the participation and interest gap. Participating in programs that prepare students for college and career readiness gives them the information and abilities they need to succeed in future endeavors. Therefore, for educational stakeholders who are committed to enhancing student outcomes, it is imperative that they comprehend and address the barriers that limit participation—even among those who are interested.

This survey's thorough investigation of methods for enhancing African American students' college and career readiness has revealed a common belief that readiness is essential to success in the future. Remarkably, the results show that teachers and students alike strongly agree on the significance of college and career readiness. The difficulties that have been identified, namely financial limitations, resource accessibility issues, and motivational barriers, underscore the complex character of obstacles that require attention. Our study also emphasizes the value of technical skills, communication,

problem-solving, and adaptability as cornerstones for negotiating the difficulties of college and career readiness.

The need for real-world, experiential learning opportunities is highlighted by the differing opinions regarding the length of the college and career readiness program and the strong support for incorporating internships and job experiences. Furthermore, these schools' significant emphasis on inclusivity and diversity points to a shift in favor of more equitable teaching methods. While great progress has been made in offering pertinent and encouraging readiness efforts, the feedback indicates that more work needs to be done to make sure the program is as successful and inclusive as possible.

There is a clear mandate for educators, governments, and educational stakeholders to prioritize and invest in activities that boost these competencies, given the agreement between students and teachers on the essential importance of preparation. In order to close the achievement gap between African American students' expectations and actual results, it will be imperative to work toward resolving the issues raised and improving the impact and accessibility of the preparedness program.

This survey was foundational to understanding and tackling college and career readiness barriers. It sets the stage for targeted strategies that aim to alleviate financial and motivational challenges and enrich students' educational experiences with essential skills for their future success. We can pave the way for a more empowering and practical approach to preparing students for the challenges and opportunities ahead by fostering an educational environment that values and promotes inclusivity, engagement, and practical skill development.

Patterns and Themes

The focus on enhancing college and career readiness for African American high school graduates was underscored by using the Plan-Do-Study-Act (PDSA) framework. This approach signified a deliberate effort to address and bridge the educational equity gap, emphasizing the necessity of creating interventions that were not only effective but also culturally responsive and equitable. The planning phase, which involved comprehensive engagement with all stakeholders, revealed a deep commitment to understanding the unique barriers African American students faced. The emphasis on stakeholder engagement underscored the belief in a collaborative approach to educational improvement that respected and incorporated the voices of those it aimed to support.

During the "Do" phase of the PDSA cycle, the focus shifted to implementing carefully designed interventions in selected high school settings. The meticulous monitoring of these interventions highlighted the importance of fidelity and responsiveness to emerging challenges. This phase was crucial for gathering real-time data on the strategies' effectiveness, directly impacting students' readiness for their future academic and professional endeavors. The emphasis on evidence-based action reflected a pragmatic approach to educational reform, one that was grounded in actual outcomes rather than theoretical expectations.

The cycle's "Study" phase provided a critical review of the data gathered, revealing which tactics had worked and what still needed to be adjusted. This stage was essential to comprehending how interventions improved African American students' college and career readiness. It was a phase of reflection during which the efficiency of

the intervention was clearly seen by carefully examining both achievements and setbacks. This phase's thorough analysis made sure that any changes to the plan were supported by strong data, which increased the likelihood of success in later cycles.

Based on the knowledge acquired during the study phase, the "Act" phase marked a strategic turn that emphasized the value of adaptation and ongoing progress. Through this iterative process, the treatments were made more effective over time by adapting to the changing needs of African American high school graduates. The cycle's structure emphasized the dedication to an agile and adaptable approach to educational development, constantly aiming to improve and hone its tactics for raising student achievement.

The initiative's first phase, defined by cooperative and strategic planning, demonstrated the significance of a thorough examination of the educational environment. The plan highlighted the need for a multimodal approach to address the varied needs of African American students by identifying crucial areas for intervention, including mentorship, academic support, career counseling, and exposure to college environments. This intervention's wide breadth indicated that college and career readiness went beyond academic preparation to include exposure to the real world and socio-emotional assistance.

The intervention's emphasis on community involvement brought to light the realization that educational difficulties were a part of broader social and economic settings. By establishing alliances with neighborhood companies, households, and community groups, our project illustrated a comprehensive strategy for helping students.

Through this involvement, the community's support of educational objectives was reinforced, and the students' learning experience was enhanced, creating a network of support outside of the classroom.

The rigorous application of process measures and the commitment to continuous monitoring and evaluation reflected a data-driven approach to educational improvement. This methodology allowed for tracking student outcomes and program effectiveness and fostered a culture of accountability and transparency among stakeholders. Celebrating successes and addressing challenges encouraged a commitment to problem-solving and innovation, strengthening the initiative's foundation of increasing the college and career readiness of African American graduates.

The initiative's deliberate development of a coalition comprising a wide range of stakeholders demonstrated its dedication to inclusivity in both planning and execution. Through the inclusion of educators, students, industry partners, and community leaders in the planning process, this strategy enhanced the program by leveraging a diverse range of viewpoints and skills. Through encouraging cooperation between these disparate groups, the program enhanced the sustainability and impact of the activities while also guaranteeing that the interventions were thorough and well-rounded. The initiatives had a higher chance of being accepted and maintained over time since this collaborative approach encouraged a sense of ownership and active participation among all parties concerned. The involvement and collective input helped create a well-rounded program that catered to the requirements of the community it served.

The program's techniques were modified in response to feedback and new needs, demonstrating the initiative's dedication to adaptability and responsiveness. The interventions were kept current and useful even when the demands of African American high school students changed thanks to this flexible methodology. Through constant strategy revision in response to direct feedback from stakeholders, the program showed a flexible approach to closing the achievement gap that was always in line with community values and goals.

The program's notable successes, which ranged from more participation in counseling sessions to an increase in college exploration from African American students, confirmed the efficacy of the customized and community-engaged strategy. These achievements offered as a ray of hope for other communities dealing with comparable educational difficulties, in addition to confirming the strategic planning and implementation of the interventions. The initiative's successes demonstrated that educational practices, when devised with a thorough understanding of each student's individual requirements and implemented in close collaboration with the community, have the ability to bring about substantial change.

It was both an academic and a social responsibility to increase African American high school graduates' college and career readiness. Using the PDSA framework as a framework, this project aimed to address and close the equality gap in educational results. The PDSA cycle's cyclical structure encouraged a methodical approach to determining workable tactics, interacting with stakeholders, and fine-tuning interventions in light of available data. The implementation of a methodical approach was crucial in addressing

the diverse issues that led to African American students' inadequate readiness for higher education. Our study sought to improve African American students' readiness by emphasizing the development of equitable and long-lasting interventions, which would help close the current gap in educational equity.

The journey through the PDSA cycle revealed the importance of a deep understanding of educational disparities and the factors contributing to them. Engaging with educators, students, families, and community stakeholders in the planning phase ensured that interventions were culturally responsive and tailored to the unique needs of African American learners. This collaborative approach highlighted the necessity of community engagement in designing effective and respectful solutions for the learners' backgrounds. The emphasis on co-designing interventions with direct input from those affected by educational disparities underscored a commitment to inclusivity and empowerment in improving college and career readiness.

The execution of interventions and the following oversight of their implementation highlighted the significance of authenticity and flexibility in tackling obstacles. In order to evaluate how interventions affected students' college and career readiness, it was essential to complete the "Do" and "Study" stages of the PDSA cycle. This evidence-based evaluation made it easier to evaluate how effective the techniques were, which made it possible to make the required adjustments. Because of the cycle's iterative design, treatments changed in response to the information gathered, emphasizing the dynamic process of continuously taking action and reflecting on how to improve educational outcomes.

The "Act" phase was pivotal in refining strategies based on the insights gained from rigorous analysis. This stage emphasized the need for ongoing innovation and adaptation to enhance the interventions' impact further. Each iteration of the PDSA cycle added to understanding the complex factors affecting college and career readiness among African American students, demonstrating the value of an evidence-based approach to educational improvement. By continuously refining the interventions, the initiative underscored a commitment to making impactful changes that addressed the root causes of under-preparedness.

The initiative's success was largely dependent on the cooperation and strategic planning that supported it. Establishing a coalition with varied stakeholders guaranteed that the interventions were comprehensive and tackled both educational and socio-emotional requirements. This all-encompassing strategy brought to light the complex aspect of college and job readiness by incorporating mentorship, career counseling, academic support, and exposure to campus life. The effort showed a dedication to developing a support system that felt relevant and personal by customizing each component to the unique needs of African American students.

The program's basis and impact were strengthened by community engagement, which highlighted the influence of larger social and economic conditions on educational issues. Through the creation of collaborations outside of the classroom, our project promoted a supporting ecosystem that aided students in their educational journeys. This strategy strengthened community trust and buy-in while giving students priceless real-

world experience, highlighting the significance of teamwork in resolving educational inequities.

The significance of data-driven decision-making was emphasized by the methodical implementation of process controls and the emphasis on continual monitoring and assessment. Through the collection of important data on program efficacy and student outcomes, the effort guaranteed accountability and openness. Open communication and open celebration of accomplishments fostered an innovative culture that valued group problem-solving. This method emphasized how important it is to keep learning and adapting in order to satisfy students' changing requirements.

The strategic formation of a collaborative team and the identification of crucial intervention areas underscored the importance of a nuanced understanding of students' needs. Tailoring interventions to align with African American students' unique challenges and aspirations was vital for effectiveness. This personalized approach ensured that the support system was comprehensive and directly relevant to the students it aimed to serve, demonstrating the value of adaptability in educational programming.

The initiative's engagement and adaption phase made clear how crucial it is to react quickly to criticism and make necessary changes. Through the establishment of strong feedback loops and a willingness to adapt strategies in response to feedback from educators and students, the program continued to be tailored to the demands of its intended audience. In order to improve the program's relevance and accessibility and achieve the objective of raising college and job readiness, it was essential to have this flexibility in responding to new obstacles and modifying techniques accordingly.

The successes throughout the initiative testified to the efficacy of a community-engaged, tailored approach to improving college and career readiness. The significant improvements in engagement and student outcomes validated the strategies employed and provided a foundation for future efforts. These achievements highlighted the potential for impactful change when educational interventions were developed with a deep understanding of students' needs and implemented in collaboration with the community.

The effort proved the worth of investing in teacher support and adaptability by focusing on PD for educators and managing unforeseen hurdles. The program met the needs of educators and improved their abilities, which had a favorable influence on teaching quality and student learning results. This strategy not only addressed pressing issues but also promoted an atmosphere of creativity and constant development, which helped the program succeed in the long run. PD seminars equipped teachers with the skills and knowledge necessary to effectively serve their African American students in the unique context of enhancing their college and career readiness.

In the end, this teacher investment demonstrated the program's dedication to establishing a supportive and stimulating learning environment. Teachers and students work together in this setting to successfully solve the difficulties and take advantage of the opportunities presented by the changing nature of education. This event made clear how important teacher empowerment is to bring about significant changes in education. It also emphasized how crucial it is for educational programs to be flexible in order to accommodate the changing demands of their members. The ability to adapt guarantees

that programs continue to be effective and relevant in fulfilling a variety of ever-changing educational demands.

In concluding the comprehensive journey through applying the PDSA framework to enhance college and career readiness among African American high school graduates, it's clear that this initiative has charted a course of meaningful impact and transformation. The endeavor, grounded in a philosophy of continuous improvement and stakeholder engagement, has navigated the complexities of educational equity and illuminated pathways to empowerment and success for African American students. By embedding the voices and experiences of those it seeks to serve at the core of its strategy, the initiative has reinforced the indispensable value of culturally responsive and personalized interventions in addressing the nuanced challenges these students face.

The iterative cycles of planning, implementation, study, and action have fostered an environment of adaptability and innovation, ensuring that each initiative phase was informed by real-world evidence and stakeholder feedback. This dynamic approach enabled the program to evolve in alignment with the changing needs and aspirations of African American high school graduates, making significant strides in preparing them for the complexities of post-secondary education and the workforce.

One of the initiative's key components, community participation allowed the treatments to have an impact outside of the classroom and address larger social and economic issues affecting educational performance. Students' learning experience was enhanced by the establishment of connections with neighborhood businesses, families, and community organizations, which gave them valuable exposure to the real world and

mentorship. This all-encompassing strategy for providing educational support emphasizes the value of teamwork in creating an environment where learning may occur.

The program's commitment to continuous monitoring and evaluation through rigorous application of process measures has established a culture of accountability and transparency. Celebrating successes and constructively addressing challenges have catalyzed a community-wide commitment to innovation and problem-solving. Furthermore, the strategic emphasis on PD for educators has highlighted the critical role of teacher empowerment in catalyzing student success and advocating for a supportive and enriching learning environment that benefits all stakeholders.

Reflecting on the journey, applying the PDSA framework has underscored the efficacy of a community-engaged, evidence-based approach in closing the educational equity gap for African American high school graduates. The successes achieved through this initiative serve as a testament to the potential for impactful change when educational strategies are meticulously designed, collaboratively implemented and continuously refined in response to stakeholder feedback and evolving needs.

As we look to the future, the lessons learned, and successes achieved lay a strong foundation for extending and deepening the impact of such initiatives. The journey through the PDSA cycle has advanced our understanding of how to enhance college and career readiness among African American students effectively and reaffirmed the critical importance of adaptability, community engagement, and stakeholder empowerment in achieving educational equity. The initiative stands as a beacon of hope and a model for

future efforts to ensure that every student, regardless of background, is equipped with the tools, resources, and support they need to navigate their path to success.

Theory of Improvement Reflection

When applying a theory of improvement to increase African American high school graduates' college and career readiness, several important themes come to light. The initiative's goal was to systematically address the educational equity gap and was based on the PDSA paradigm. It showed a dedication to creating treatments that catered to the particular difficulties experienced by African American students while also being culturally sensitive. A wide range of stakeholders were involved in the co-design of interventions throughout the planning phase, which was characterized by a collaborative effort to ensure that the strategies were based on the needs and lived experiences of the students they were intended to serve.

The implementation phase ("Do") revealed the importance of close monitoring and adaptability as interventions were rolled out in selected high school settings. This period was crucial for collecting real-time data, which informed the rigorous analysis during the "Study" phase. Here, the effectiveness of interventions on students' readiness for college and careers was critically assessed, highlighting the necessity of an evidence-based approach to educational reform. Insights gained from this phase informed the subsequent "Act" phase, where strategies were refined based on the collected evidence, underscoring the iterative continuous improvement process.

Community involvement became clear as we traveled along this path, supporting the idea that African American high school graduates faced problems outside of the

classroom that were intricately linked to larger social and economic issues. Through forming alliances with neighborhood companies, households, and community groups, our project established a nurturing environment that furnished students with practical encounters, guidance, and supplementary materials, enhancing their educational path and underscoring the significance of an all-encompassing strategy for academic assistance.

During the planning stage, the tactical assembly of a cooperative team and the identification of important areas for action were crucial. This method made it easier to have a thorough grasp of the educational system and guaranteed that the interventions were made to meet the academic and socioemotional needs of African American students. The success and applicability of the program depended heavily on the intervention's ability to be customized so that each component matched the unique requirements and circumstances of the learner.

The initiative's responsiveness to input and adaptability in modifying techniques in response to the changing demands of the target population were emphasized during the engagement and adaptation phase. This flexibility was essential in tackling new issues and boosting the program's significance, which advanced the objective of improving African American high school graduates' college and career readiness. The initiative's results laid a strong platform for future work by showing that when educational interventions are created with a thorough understanding of the needs of the students and put into practice in close partnership with the community, significant change can be achieved.

Overcoming unforeseen obstacles demonstrated the need for flexibility and the return on investment in teacher support, especially in the area of PD for educators. Teaching quality and student learning outcomes were positively improved by the program, which also addressed the requirements of educators by strengthening their abilities. This strategy promoted an atmosphere of ongoing innovation and development, which helped the program succeed in the long run.

In the end, the effort emphasized the necessity of programs being adaptable and sensitive to the changing demands of all stakeholders, underscoring the crucial role that teacher empowerment plays in bringing about genuine educational reform. The initiative successfully navigated the challenges of enhancing college and career readiness among African American high school graduates by using a collaborative, evidence-based approach based on the PDSA framework. This demonstrated the effectiveness of community engagement, customized interventions, and ongoing adaptation in achieving educational equity and empowerment.

It is clear that this methodological approach had a substantial influence when considering how drivers and change concepts were applied inside the PDSA framework to improve college and career readiness among African American high school graduates. The first stage of identifying drivers, which included things like expanding exposure to college environments, boosting career counseling, improving academic support, and putting mentorship programs in place, set the groundwork for more focused interventions. These motivators were not just theoretical ideas; rather, they were based on a thorough comprehension of the obstacles and difficulties that African American

students face. The co-design of treatments that were culturally sensitive and closely matched the needs of the students was achieved through cooperative planning and involvement with educators, students, and community partners.

The dedication to closely observing the implementation process throughout the "Do" phase demonstrated the vital role that fidelity plays in carrying out change concepts. The viability of the drivers and the efficacy of the change concepts were put to the test during this phase. Real-time adjustments were done in response to ground feedback and newly arising difficulties. This flexibility was essential to preserving the treatments' impact and relevance and making sure they continued to be in line with improving students' college and careers readiness. The PDSA cycle's cyclical structure allowed for constant strategy improvement and enabled a dynamic response to the intricacies of educational inequality.

The "Study" phase gave important information about how the interventions affected students' readiness for college and careers. A specific indicator of performance was provided by quantitative data analysis, which revealed which tactics were effective and which fell short of expectations. Understanding the effectiveness of the treatments and the complexities of applying change ideas in various educational contexts were made possible by this evidence-based reflection. The data-driven methodology made sure that conclusions were grounded on observable results rather than conjecture, giving the "Act" phase's decision-makers a strong foundation on which to make decisions.

It was shown how solving educational difficulties is iterative and evolutionary when tactics were refined based on findings from the study phase. The "Act" phase

marked the end and a change toward interventions that would have a greater lasting influence. This cycle of action and reflection persisted, shedding more light on the intricate interactions between variables influencing African American students' college and career readiness. The PDSA framework turned out to be more than just a methodological instrument; it served as a channel for ongoing innovation and improvement because of the dedication to genuinely improving the lives of these students.

One of the main factors contributing to the initiative's success was community engagement. Beyond the classroom, African American high school students faced issues rooted in larger social and economic circumstances. By forming alliances with nearby companies, households, and community organizations, the intervention produced a nurturing environment that enhanced the students' educational experience. These partnerships played a crucial role in offering practical experiences and guidance, thereby advancing a comprehensive strategy for educational assistance. The involvement extended beyond conventional academic bounds, enhancing the program's influence and cultivating community trust.

During the planning stage, the tactical creation of a cooperative coalition was essential. With educators, students, community leaders, and business partners involved, this inclusive approach made sure that the interventions were thorough and addressed the complex aspects of college and career readiness. Based on a comprehensive examination of the educational system, the coalition's work pinpointed important areas that needed to be addressed in order to ensure students' overall growth. This group effort served as

evidence of the effectiveness of collective action in bringing about significant changes in education.

The tailored approach to implementing interventions highlighted the importance of customization and relevance. The initiative ensured that the support was compelling and personally resonant by aligning the interventions with African American students' unique needs and circumstances. This attention to personalization was a critical factor in the program's acceptance and success within the community, demonstrating a deep respect for the diversity of student experiences and aspirations.

Throughout the initiative, the diligent application of process measures and a commitment to ongoing monitoring and evaluation underscored the significance of a data-driven approach. Celebrating successes and transparently addressing challenges fostered a culture of accountability and collective problem-solving. This systematic approach to measurement and reflection was vital to understanding the dynamic needs of students, ensuring that the interventions evolved to meet the emerging challenges.

The engagement and adaption phase emphasized how important it is to be receptive to criticism and flexible enough to make last-minute changes. This adaptability was essential to improving the interventions' accessibility and relevance and advancing the objective of raising college and career readiness. The program's flexibility in responding to input from stakeholders showed a dedication to ongoing development, which is a sign of a truly influential learning project.

Upon reflection on the trip, it is evident that the drivers and change ideas, when implemented via the PDSA framework, increased African American high school

graduates' college and career readiness. Future endeavors can benefit greatly from the accomplishments made and the knowledge gained from the difficulties faced. The experience demonstrated the potential for significant change when techniques are customized to match the unique requirements of students and implemented with flexibility and responsiveness, underscoring the need for a collaborative, evidence-based approach to tackling educational inequities.

In summary, using the PDSA framework to improve African American high school graduates' college and career readiness has shed light on the future with insightful findings and observable results. With careful planning, smart execution, in-depth research, and flexible measures, our project has made tremendous progress in closing the achievement gap in education. In addition to being culturally sensitive, the joint efforts of educators, students, and community members have been crucial in creating and implementing interventions that are deeply aware of the special needs of African American students. This process has emphasized the value of community involvement by bringing to light the reality that these children face difficulties that go beyond preparation for the classroom and take into account broader social and economic issues.

The initiative's ability to adjust in response to feedback and evolving requirements has emphasized how crucial flexibility and ongoing improvement are to educational reform. The outcomes of this iterative process offer a solid basis for further endeavors, showcasing the possibility of significant transformation when interventions are formulated with a comprehensive comprehension of the student's requirements and executed in close cooperation with the community. Additionally, the effort has brought

attention to the crucial roles that PD and teacher empowerment play in bringing about significant changes in education, highlighting the necessity of programs that are flexible enough to meet the changing requirements of all parties involved.

Through the use of an evidence-based, community-engaged strategy, the initiative has helped African American high school students better prepare for college and career readiness. As a result, it has provided a model for attaining educational equity and empowerment. The PDSA framework, with its strategic application of drivers and change concepts, has shown to be a successful paradigm for tackling the complex issues of college and career readiness. As we proceed, it is evident that maintaining and advancing these initiatives will call for constant dedication, creativity, and cooperation. All parties interested in establishing a more inclusive and fair educational environment, as well as those directly involved in the endeavor, can greatly benefit from the lessons acquired from this program.

Limitations and Lessons Learned

The initiative to enhance college and career readiness among African American high school graduates, framed within the PDSA framework, reveals several key insights into the complex nature of educational improvement efforts. The pressing imperative to address the educational equity gap was met with a multifaceted approach, emphasizing community engagement, evidence-based strategies, and the importance of adaptability and continuous improvement. This endeavor sought to bridge existing disparities and create a sustainable impact on African American students' educational outcomes and opportunities.

The collaborative planning process made clear how important it is to include a range of stakeholders when creating interventions. Through the co-creation process, our project involved educators, students, families, and community leaders, guaranteeing that the interventions were tailored to the specific needs of African American learners while also being culturally sensitive. This strategy emphasized the need of establishing a feeling of community ownership and collaboration by firmly rooted educational changes in the goals and real-world experiences of the people they are intended to assist.

The necessity of continuously monitoring the interventions' implementation and being adaptable to new challenges became clear when they were put into practice. The PDSA cycle's "Do" and "Study" stages made it possible to dynamically assess the tactics' efficacy and make improvements in response to real-time feedback. The need for adaptability in educational endeavors was illustrated by this iterative approach, which made sure that interventions continued to be effective and relevant even when the target population's requirements changed.

Beyond the classroom, the community played a crucial role in promoting educational success by highlighting the connections between academic difficulties and larger social and economic issues. Through forming alliances with nearby companies and associations, the program developed a helpful network that gave students access to resources and experiences that enhanced their educational journey. This all-encompassing strategy for providing educational support demonstrated the effectiveness of teamwork in removing the various obstacles to college and career readiness.

The effort proved successful by raising student participation and improving academic results, which amply established the effectiveness of the tactics it used. Our study also emphasized the need for ongoing PD and the crucial role that teacher empowerment plays. The program addressed urgent educational difficulties and contributed to long-term sustained effectiveness by improving instructors' capacities to serve students. This simultaneous emphasis on short-term outcomes and long-term development brought attention to the significance of investing in teachers' knowledge and skills to make sure they are prepared to meet and adjust to the changing demands of their students.

The program provides a framework for tackling educational inequities through a collaborative and evidence-based approach, by reflecting on the use of the PDSA paradigm. The accomplishments and the lessons gained highlight the possibility of significant change when educational tactics are carefully planned and carried out with community involvement. Moving ahead, the program will continue to prioritize adaptation and ongoing improvement to make sure all students, regardless of background, have access to the resources and assistance they need to succeed in their academic and career pursuits.

Our study's groundbreaking goal was to improve African American high school graduates' college and career readiness. This goal was motivated by the urgent need to close the equity gap in educational results. This effort, which employed the PDSA paradigm, conducted a systematic investigation of treatments intended to be both equitable and feasible. In order to guarantee that the solutions created were evidence-

based, culturally sensitive, and specifically customized to the issues experienced by African American students, a significant amount of stakeholder interaction was observed throughout the early design phase. This cooperative method created a strong basis for the phases of analysis, implementation, and refinement that followed.

During the implementation phase, the initiative deployed targeted interventions across selected high schools, closely monitoring their execution to ensure fidelity and swiftly address emerging challenges. This meticulous oversight facilitated a rich accumulation of data rigorously analyzed in the study phase to assess the interventions' impact on students' readiness for college and careers. The insights gleaned from this analysis informed the subsequent act phase, where strategies were refined based on empirical evidence, underscoring the iterative and responsive nature of the PDSA cycle.

A key result of this initiative was a richer appreciation for how critical community involvement is in boosting academic performance. By working with local businesses, families, and community organizations, the initiative built a support network that surpassed traditional educational help. This network provided students with essential real-world experiences and opportunities for mentorship. The holistic approach not only improved the students' educational experiences but also fostered a sense of ownership and involvement among community members, enhancing both the program's foundation and its overall impact. Through this collaborative effort, the broader community stands to gain from the educational benefits more inclusively and extensively.

The initiative also highlighted the importance of adaptability and continuous improvement. Through ongoing monitoring and evaluation, coupled with a commitment

to responding to feedback, the program demonstrated an ability to evolve and address the dynamic needs of African American high school graduates. This adaptive approach ensured that interventions remained relevant and practical, ultimately significantly increasing college and career readiness among the targeted student population.

Also, the initiative's emphasis on teacher PD emphasized how important educators are to promoting students' achievement. The effort improved teaching quality and improved student learning outcomes by strengthening instructors' skills and attending to their needs. The initiative's primary goals were advanced and a more dynamic and productive learning environment was created by placing a strong emphasis on empowering and supporting instructors.

To sum up, this study's PDSA cycle experience has given researchers important new information about how to help more African American students become college and career ready. The triumphs attained and the obstacles faced have established a strong basis for subsequent endeavors, showcasing the revolutionary capacity of cooperative, fact-based methods for educational restructuring. Lessons learned will continue to guide and motivate ongoing efforts as the program progresses to guarantee that every student, regardless of background, has access to the resources and assistance required to succeed in their post-secondary education and professional aspirations.

A number of insights become apparent when examining the effort to improve African American high school graduates' college and career readiness via the lens of improvement science and the PDSA framework. These insights highlight the complex nature of educational reform. This analysis highlights the significance of a methodical,

empirically supported approach in tackling the various obstacles African American students encounter while getting ready for college or a career.

First off, involving a broad spectrum of stakeholders during the planning stage brought to light how important community involvement is to educational efforts. Working together with teachers, students, families, and community members enhanced the interventions and made sure they were based on the needs and realities of the people they were intended to assist. Participants felt more empowered as a result of the inclusivity, which also highlighted the importance of culturally sensitive teaching methods in initiatives to promote education.

Secondly, the dynamic approach to problem-solving made possible by the PDSA cycle's cyclical nature allowed for real-time adaptations depending on feedback and new difficulties. This flexibility was essential to improving therapies and guaranteeing their applicability and efficacy. The cycle's planning, doing, researching, and acting phases each offered insightful information that improved students' college and career readiness, highlighting the importance of an evidence-based approach to educational change.

Thirdly, the initiative's emphasis on tackling wider social and economic aspects highlighted the need for an all-encompassing strategy for educational assistance. Understanding that problems are not limited to the classroom but are intricately linked to social issues, the program made use of community collaborations to give students access to resources and experiences from the real world, enhancing their educational experience and promoting their general development.

Fourthly, the emphasis on PD for educators highlighted the importance of equipping teachers with the skills and knowledge to support students effectively. Investing in educators' growth improved the teaching quality and reinforced the program's goals, demonstrating a commitment to fostering an environment conducive to student success.

And fifthly, the positive outcomes observed through the initiative—increased engagement, improved readiness skills, and heightened student confidence—affirmed the effectiveness of the tailored, community-engaged approach. These achievements underscored the potential for impactful change when strategies are developed with a deep understanding of the student's needs and are implemented collaboratively.

This reflection on applying improvement science principles and the PDSA framework in enhancing college and career readiness among African American high school graduates offers valuable lessons for future initiatives. It highlights the importance of stakeholder engagement, adaptability, a holistic perspective, and a commitment to PD in driving meaningful educational change. As we look forward to building on these successes, the insights gained from this initiative guide developing more equitable and effective academic strategies, ensuring that every student can achieve their full potential.

The PDSA framework is being used in an effort to improve African American high school graduates' college and career readiness. This project demonstrates the significant effects of a team-based, research-based strategy for closing the achievement gap. Through extensive stakeholder engagement during the design and implementation phase, our project made sure that the solutions were culturally appropriate. It emphasized

how crucial community engagement is to educational change. The PDSA cycle's repetitive nature made it possible to dynamically change the technique, emphasizing the need for adaptability and ongoing development in response to students' changing requirements. This project dramatically raised participation and produced better results, proving the effectiveness of the implemented tactics and reiterating how important it is for teachers to be empowered and to continue their professional growth. Thinking back on this trip offers insightful information for next educational programs, highlighting the fact that significant change may occur when initiatives are supported by data, customized to the requirements of the community, and carried out with a dedication to continuous assessment and modification.

Spreading Change/Next Cycle (ACT)

The initiative to enhance college and career readiness among African American high school graduates, framed within the PDSA framework, was a significant step toward addressing educational disparities. The initial phase involved a comprehensive analysis of the current educational landscape, identifying critical areas targeted interventions could substantially impact. Through collaborative efforts with educators, students, and community stakeholders, strategies were co-designed to be both culturally responsive and tailored to the specific needs of African American learners. Implementing these strategies across selected high schools marked the beginning of a transformative journey, closely monitored to ensure fidelity and address any emerging challenges. The insights gained from this phase informed continuous refinements, underscoring the value of adaptability in educational reform.

The program's progression made it clearer and clearer how important community involvement is to promote educational goals. Collaborations were formed with nearby companies, civic associations, and households, establishing an ecosystem of support that goes beyond conventional educational assistance. By giving students access to extra resources, mentorship, and real-world experiences, these partnerships enhanced their educational journeys and increased the initiative's overall effect. The program's all-encompassing approach brought to light the connections between academic difficulties and larger social and economic issues, underscoring the significance of providing African American students with a robust support network.

The successes observed throughout the initiative, including increased student engagement and improved readiness skills, validated the strategies' effectiveness. However, the journey also sheds light on the crucial role of teacher empowerment and the necessity of ongoing PD. By addressing educators' needs and enhancing their abilities to support students effectively, the program tackled immediate challenges and contributed to its long-term success. This focus on PD emphasized equipping teachers with the tools to foster a positive and effective learning environment.

Upon reflection, the PDSA framework application to this effort yielded important insights on improving African American students' college and career readiness. Because the framework was iterative in nature, it made it possible to respond dynamically to the complexities of educational inequities and to continuously improve solutions in light of feedback and real-world facts. The use of an evidence-based approach guaranteed the interventions' continued relevance and effectiveness, highlighting the possibility of

significant change that arises from efforts that are firmly rooted in a thorough comprehension of the target population's needs.

The initiative's emphasis on tackling more significant social and economic problems highlighted the significance of an all-encompassing approach to educational support. The initiative greatly improved students' learning experiences by building relationships within and outside of the classroom and giving them access to priceless events and resources. Furthermore, this all-encompassing support system helped African American students not only meet their academic demands but also develop holistically, setting them up for success after high school. This method made sure that students were ready for the chances and challenges that awaited them once they graduate.

As the program came to an end, it became clear how important it was to implement the improvements that worked and to keep improving tactics in light of the lessons that were discovered. The endeavor's accomplishments established a robust basis for wider implementation and influence, underscoring the necessity of flexibility and expansion in subsequent endeavors. By remaining relevant and effective even as it extended into new situations, the program was able to adapt to the evolving requirements of students thanks to the continual evaluation and adaptation efforts.

In the future, this initiative's insights will offer a road map for improving empowerment and educational equity for African American recent graduates. The community can actively participate in the careful design and implementation of initiatives that have the potential to bring about significant change, as evidenced by the collaborative and evidence-based approach. Building on these achievements, attempts to

close the educational equity gap will continue to depend heavily on the dedication to ongoing improvement and stakeholder engagement.

Some follow-up measures were judged necessary to maintain and expand the impact of the intervention, which was initially successful in improving African American high school students' college and career readiness. Stakeholders came together to discuss the program's results and input and pinpoint areas where improvements may be made to make it more efficient. Creating a stronger structure for teacher PD was one crucial step in acknowledging the critical role that teachers play in the achievement of their students. Plans were also made to broaden the network of community collaborations in order to give students access to more possibilities for mentorship and real-world experiences. This strategic expansion was motivated by the realization that comprehensive student development requires a supporting environment outside of the classroom.

It was also thought that program implementation modifications were necessary to adapt to the changing needs of the student body. Data gathered throughout the PDSA cycle's "Study" phase identified particular areas where interventions may be more precisely targeted to address the particular difficulties faced by various student groups. Consequently, a more customized method of career counseling and mentorship was implemented, utilizing technology to enable unique support programs for every student. This modification made sure that all students, regardless of where they were coming from or what their goals were, could make use of the program. In addition, attempts were undertaken to improve the use of Internet resources, realizing their vital function in offering adaptable and all-encompassing assistance for college and career readiness.

The initiative's success led to further investigation into the treatments' long-term effects on students' post-high school trajectories. To obtain empirical data on the program's efficacy over time, a longitudinal study was started to monitor participants' college and career readiness. The purpose of this study was to investigate scholastic success, the acquisition of critical life skills, and the achievement of fulfilling work. It was anticipated that the results would offer insightful information about how early interventions can affect long-term effectiveness, supplying a data-driven foundation for future program improvements and policy suggestions.

Understanding the value of ongoing development, the program leadership examined the methods for receiving feedback from teachers and students. Making sure that these channels were useful for gathering feedback and experiences from all parties involved while also being easily accessible was the aim. Progress monitoring channels were included as adjustments to enable more timely and nuanced insights into the program's impact. These improved feedback methods made it possible to make more flexible and responsive program adjustments by helping to discover new trends and issues.

In light of the initiative's positive outcomes, discussions were held regarding its expansion to other regions and student populations facing similar challenges. This scaling effort was informed by a detailed analysis of the program's components, identifying those most critical for replication in new contexts. Special attention was given to adapting the interventions to meet different communities' cultural and socioeconomic characteristics, ensuring the program's relevance and effectiveness across diverse settings. The expansion

plan included a phased rollout, accompanied by rigorous evaluation to monitor the adaptability and impact of the program in varying educational landscapes.

The program's effect on college and career readiness also brought attention to the need for improved cooperation between companies and post-secondary educational institutions. An attempt was made to fortify these alliances, facilitating the transfer of high school graduates into college and the workforce. Together, these groups developed common objectives and tactics—like internships and bridging programs—to assist students in succeeding. The improved relationships with universities and businesses gave students useful career routes and enhanced the cohesion of the ecosystem that promotes student development.

As the project advanced, the contribution of technology to enhancing college and career readiness became more apparent. Opportunities for improvement were found during the program's examination of the digital tools and platforms used, especially with regard to user engagement and accessibility. Further modifications involved the incorporation of applications that are optimized for mobile devices and gamification components to augment student engagement with digital resources. In order to reach students where they are, this technical advancement made use of the popularity of interactive learning and the widespread use of smartphones to encourage greater involvement with the program's content.

Ultimately, the initiative's all-encompassing strategy for improving African American high school graduates' college and career readiness for the workforce highlighted the significance of structural transformation inside educational

establishments. Increased advocacy was done to advance laws and procedures that generally facilitate inclusion and equity in education. Through advocating for changes at the district, state, and federal levels, these initiatives aimed to address structural hurdles to college and career preparedness. The program sought to establish a more equal and supportive learning environment for all students by integrating direct interventions with systemic advocacy. This approach ensured that the accomplishments made possible could be maintained and built upon in the future.

The expansion and refinement of the intervention aimed at increasing the percentage of African American students graduating high school ready for college or careers faced various facilitating factors and potential hindrances in its next cycle. A key facilitating factor was the established community support and engagement foundation garnered during the initial phases. The positive outcomes and tangible benefits observed from the program cultivated a strong network of support among educators, families, and local businesses eager to contribute to its continued success. However, this enthusiasm was tempered by concerns about sustainable funding. Securing ongoing financial support remained a critical challenge as the program sought to expand its reach and deepen its impact, highlighting the necessity of diversified funding streams to ensure long-term viability.

Integration of technology was shown to be both a potential help and a hindrance for the subsequent version of the intervention. On the one hand, the program's influence was efficiently scaled thanks to the creative methods that digital platforms and technologies allowed to deliver career counseling and tailored learning experiences. The

first cycle's effective use of online resources showed how they may improve accessibility and student participation. However, the digital divide presented a serious problem because different students would find it more difficult to participate due to differences in their access to dependable internet and technology outside the school setting. In order to guarantee that the program's benefits were dispersed fairly, it was imperative to close this gap, highlighting the necessity of investments in digital infrastructure and assistance.

The evolving educational landscape, marked by changes in curriculum standards and graduation requirements, presented another factor to consider. While these changes offered opportunities to align the program with state and national educational goals more closely, they also required continuous adaptation of the curriculum and strategies to remain relevant. The dynamic nature of educational policies necessitated a flexible approach to program design and implementation, ensuring that interventions remained aligned with broader educational objectives while meeting the specific needs of African American students.

The wealth of knowledge and comprehension from the program's first cycle served as another enabler. The evidence-based method gave a thorough grasp of what worked and what could be improved, which influenced strategic decisions for the upcoming cycle. However, there was still a hurdle in the way of effectively analyzing and applying this data. To use the collected data to make well-informed adjustments, a complex data management and analysis technique was required, underscoring the importance of building strong analytical capabilities inside the program.

The success of the program was largely attributed to instructors' commitment to PD. The first investment in teacher training and support yielded improved teaching quality and increased student engagement. It was challenging, though, to maintain this level of support and guarantee that all educators have the resources necessary to satisfy the evolving needs of their students. The program's ambition to expand underscored the need for ongoing PD activities by emphasizing how important it was to recruit and retain gifted educators who shared its objectives.

Partnerships with post-secondary institutions and employers played a vital role in bridging the gap between high school and the following stages of education and career. These collaborations were instrumental in providing real-world learning opportunities and pathways for students. However, expanding and deepening these partnerships required significant effort and coordination. Navigating the complexities of aligning educational programs with the needs of colleges and the labor market posed a continuous challenge, calling for dedicated resources to manage these critical relationships.

Lastly, the surrounding communities and its cultural context influenced the program's working environment, posing both opportunities and challenges. The program's success was primarily ascribed to its emphasis on addressing the unique issues faced by African American students and its culturally responsive educational approach. Notwithstanding, alterations in community dynamics, such as modifications in the nearby economy or population, may impact the efficacy and pertinence of the program. Community input and involvement became more and more important as our project went

on since the program's long-term viability hinged on its capacity to recognize these shifts and make necessary adjustments.

As the program prepared for its next iteration, navigating these facilitating factors and challenges required a balanced approach, leveraging strengths and addressing barriers with strategic foresight. The commitment to continuous improvement, grounded in community support and data-driven insights, provided a strong foundation for overcoming obstacles and enhancing the college and career readiness of African American high school students.

The initiative to enhance college and career readiness among African American high school graduates, framed within the PDSA framework, was a significant step toward addressing educational disparities. The initial phase involved a comprehensive analysis of the current educational landscape, identifying critical areas targeted interventions could substantially impact. Through collaborative efforts with educators, students, and community stakeholders, strategies were co-designed to be both culturally responsive and tailored to the specific needs of African American learners. Implementing these strategies across selected high schools marked the beginning of a transformative journey, closely monitored to ensure fidelity and address any emerging challenges. The insights gained from this phase informed continuous refinements, underscoring the value of adaptability in educational reform.

The program's progression made it clearer and clearer how important community involvement is to promoting educational goals. Collaborations were formed with nearby companies, civic associations, and households, establishing an ecosystem of support that

goes beyond conventional educational assistance. By giving students access to extra resources, mentorship, and real-world experiences, these partnerships enhanced their educational journeys and increased the initiative's overall effect. The program's all-encompassing approach brought to light the connections between academic difficulties and larger social and economic issues, underscoring the significance of providing African American students with a robust support network.

The successes observed throughout the initiative, including increased student engagement and improved readiness skills, validated the strategies' effectiveness. However, the journey also sheds light on the crucial role of teacher empowerment and the necessity of ongoing PD. By addressing educators' needs and enhancing their abilities to support students effectively, the program tackled immediate challenges and contributed to its long-term success. This focus on PD emphasized equipping teachers with the tools to foster a positive and effective learning environment.

Upon reflection, the PDSA framework application to this effort yielded important insights on improving African American students' college and career readiness. Because the framework was iterative in nature, it made it possible to respond dynamically to the complexities of educational inequities and to continuously improve solutions in light of feedback and real-world facts. The use of an evidence-based approach guaranteed the interventions' continued relevance and effectiveness, highlighting the possibility of significant change that arises from efforts that are firmly rooted in a thorough comprehension of the target population's needs.

The initiative's emphasis on tackling more significant social and economic issues highlighted the need for an all-encompassing strategy for educational support. By forming relationships outside of the classroom, the program enhanced students' educational journeys by giving them access to invaluable experiences and resources. In addition to addressing the academic demands of African American students, this all-encompassing support structure promoted their general development and set them up for success after high school.

As the program came to an end, it became clear how important it was to implement the improvements that worked and to keep improving tactics in light of the lessons that were discovered. The endeavor's accomplishments established a robust basis for wider implementation and influence, underscoring the necessity of flexibility and expansion in subsequent endeavors. By remaining relevant and effective even as it extended into new situations, the program was able to adapt to the evolving requirements of students thanks to the continual evaluation and adaptation efforts.

Conclusion

The initiative to enhance college and career readiness among African American high school graduates embarked on a transformative journey, leveraging the PDSA framework to address systemic educational disparities. At its inception, stakeholders thoroughly analyzed the underlying factors contributing to the readiness gap. This collaborative phase was instrumental in identifying targeted areas for intervention, ensuring that the strategies developed were evidence-based, culturally sensitive, and tailored to meet the unique needs of African American students. The engagement of

educators, students, and the broader community in this process underscored the commitment to creating interventions that resonated with those they aimed to serve, fostering a sense of ownership and collaboration from the outset.

The planning-stage tactics were meticulously implemented at several high schools as our project entered the "Do" phase. This stage was characterized by a heavy focus on monitoring the faithfulness of the interventions and responding promptly to any problems that surfaced. To adapt to the student's changing needs, the application has to be able to modify and enhance methods in real-time. The dedication to a hands-on approach ensured that the interventions were implemented and integrated into the student's educational experiences, making it feasible to achieve the program's goals.

The opportunity to carefully evaluate the results of the tactics that were put into practice was presented by the ensuing "Study" phase. By means of meticulous examination of both quantitative and qualitative data, the initiative acquired a significant understanding of the efficacy of the treatments. This evidence-based assessment was essential to figuring out which tactics succeeded, and which failed, as well as why. The value of an iterative approach to educational reform—where learnings from each cycle inform ongoing improvements—was highlighted by the collection and analysis of data.

In the "Act" phase, the insights gained from the study phase informed strategic refinements to the program. This stage was instrumental in closing the loop of the PDSA cycle, ensuring that the lessons learned were systematically applied to enhance the program's impact. The iterative nature of this process highlighted the initiative's

commitment to evolving and adapting in response to empirical evidence, laying a foundation for sustained impact and scalability.

The vital significance of community involvement was made clear during our project. The initiative built a supportive community outside of the classroom, giving students exposure to real-world situations and mentorship, which improved their educational experiences. Along with the usual academic support, this comprehensive approach addressed the bigger social and economic concerns affecting educational success. The accomplishments of these partnerships provided evidence of how community involvement may result in important advances in the field of education.

The story of African American students' readiness for college and careers is marked by resilience, hope, and a steadfast belief in education's ability to change lives. This story urges us to contribute to building a more equitable and inclusive future. The insights gained from these students' experiences undoubtedly steer our efforts, motivating us to take action and effect change in the quest for educational excellence for everyone.

The initiative's successes, including improved college and career readiness among African American high school graduates, validated the efficacy of the adopted strategies. However, the journey also illuminated areas for further growth, particularly the importance of ongoing PD for educators and the need for continued community engagement. These insights celebrated the program's achievements and highlighted the pathway for future enhancements, setting the stage for broader application and impact.

When the initiative's PDSA cycle was examined, a captivating story of adaptation, teamwork, and community involvement emerged. The program's evidence-based

methodology made sure that interventions had both relevance and impact, which cleared the path for closing the educational equity gap for African American students. The initiative's lessons learned offer a useful framework for upcoming initiatives aimed at improving academic achievements for marginalized communities.

As we transition to Chapter 4, we examine how our study's conclusions may affect future research, practice, and policy. In order to guarantee fairness and inclusion in education, the following chapter will go into greater detail on how the initiative's insights might direct the creation of focused interventions, inform more comprehensive educational changes, and affect policy choices. our project provides a strong starting point for a conversation about expanding the program's influence and a road map for those involved who are dedicated to creating a learning environment in which every student can achieve.

CHAPTER FOUR

REFLECTIONS, IMPLICATIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Introduction

The study was started in response to a troubling disparity in education: about 65% of African American high school graduates in the study site lacked the skills required to graduate high school college or be career ready, per the South Carolina Department of Education. This notable discrepancy made precise how urgently tailored interventions are needed to serve these students successfully. Therefore, the study aimed to investigate and pinpoint tactics that could improve African American students' college and career readiness. By addressing this disparity and providing this population with more access to substantial economic and professional opportunities, the project aimed to enhance educational results.

The chapter is thoughtfully organized to provide a thorough synopsis of the methodology and conclusions of the study. It will start with a comprehensive analysis of the preliminary results, assessing how well the techniques that were put into practice worked. Subsequently, the effects of these interventions on student preparation were examined, with particular attention paid to academic performance and engagement indicators. The chapter's reflections will shed light on which changes produced the most significant effects and how they might be implemented more broadly.

After that, there will be a discussion of the study's ramifications. Did the results observed have the potential to affect educational practice and policy, especially in teacher preparation and curriculum development? The chapter will strongly emphasize how

comparable educational environments that struggle with student college and career readiness should use the effective tactics found as models. The initiatives' broader potential to bring about systemic change in educational equity will also be considered, underscoring the significance of sustained policy support and activism.

Conclusions drawn from the study will be presented, summarizing the significant achievements in increasing college and career readiness among African American students. The data confirmed that targeted interventions could significantly alter educational trajectories for underprepared students. However, the chapter also will acknowledge the need for ongoing research to address persistent gaps and refine the approaches tested. These conclusions will underscore the progress made while framing what needs to be accomplished.

The chapter's last portion will offer suggestions for educators, lawmakers, and local government representatives. These recommendations center on improving programs for preparing teachers to help African American children become more prepared for college and career readiness and to extend the reach of effective programs. Furthermore, the significance of community engagement and support systems will be emphasized as vital for maintaining the momentum attained by the research. The suggested solutions are meant to give interested parties a clear route ahead so that the advancement of educational equity can keep growing and changing.

The study sets the stage for a deep and analytical exploration of the educational disparities affecting African American high school graduates, particularly their readiness for college and careers. This study was started because African American children at the

research location had a startling 65% unpreparedness rate. It highlights the urgent need for specialized educational interventions to close this gap. By pinpointing and implementing effective strategies to enhance college and career readiness, the project seeks to provide these students with more significant economic and professional opportunities, thereby improving overall educational outcomes. This introductory narrative highlights the study's critical importance and frames its overarching goal: to develop and disseminate interventions that can substantially enhance educational trajectories for underprepared African American students.

As the chapter unfolds, it promises to comprehensively analyze the interventions' effectiveness and their broader implications on educational practice and policy. This chapter aims to demonstrate how focused interventions can result in notable gains in student readiness. It evaluates early findings and describes how effective tactics might be applied in comparable educational environments. The subsequent sections will delve into the ramifications of these findings, exploring their potential to influence curriculum development and teacher training and emphasizing the role of sustained policy support and community activism in fostering educational equity. By concluding with practical recommendations for educators, policymakers, and community leaders, the chapter will chart a course for ongoing improvement and scaling of successful initiatives, ensuring that the momentum gained from this study contributes to lasting change in the educational landscape.

Reflection on the Improvement Science Process

The research journey to enhance college and career readiness for African American high school graduates began by addressing the challenge of unpreparedness rooted in systemic inequalities and varied educational opportunities. Initially, extensive data collection, integrating quantitative and qualitative methodologies, helped grasp the nuances of the readiness gap across different groups. Engaging with educators, students, and policymakers was crucial for gathering insights that shaped subsequent interventions, as recommended by Schleicher (2013).

Challenges emerged during the implementation of interventions, particularly in ensuring consistent application across diverse educational settings. Resistance arose when new methods clashed with traditional practices, highlighting the complexities of implementing change within established systems, as Evans et al. (2023) and MacDonald (2020) noted. Despite these challenges, progress was observed in schools adopting collaborative practices and integrating student support systems, emphasizing the importance of flexibility and local adaptability in intervention strategies.

Interim evaluations revealed promising enhancements in student engagement and academic performance, identifying effective strategies and necessary conditions for success, as seen by Reschly (2020), Berridge et al. (2021), and Hofkens and Ruzek (2019). These evaluations underscored the need for sustained support and resources to ensure the durability and impact of educational reforms. Efforts then focused on scaling successful interventions to a broader audience without compromising effectiveness. Collaborative engagements with educational leaders and community stakeholders were intensified to expand the reach of these strategies, as observed by Zhang et al. (2022),

Ruby and McLaughlin (2021), and Ferretti and Hiebert (2017). This phase involved numerous workshops, training sessions, and policy discussions to integrate effective practices into the larger educational framework.

The study concluded with comprehensive findings and robust recommendations, documenting significant improvements and identifying areas for further investigation and development. Final recommendations emphasized adaptable and responsive educational strategies to keep pace with changing educational landscapes and student needs, as recognized by Miller et al. (2021), Ramaley et al. (2023), and Roberts (2022). These aimed to institutionalize successful practices to enhance future educational opportunities for African American students, setting a foundation for ongoing initiatives to sustain and expand educational equity.

Improvement science fundamentally shaped the methodology for increasing college and career readiness among African American high school students. Ferretti and Hiebert (2017) and Johnson and Christensen (2020) suggest that recognizing the importance of being responsive to data and willing to adapt strategies based on student feedback and educational outcomes is essential. The Plan-Do-Study-Act (PDSA) cycle guided efforts, beginning with identifying barriers through quantitative and qualitative methods, as Guetterman (2020) suggested. Initial data collection, combining academic performance metrics with direct student feedback, was crucial for establishing a baseline to measure progress and evaluate the efficacy of interventions.

The first iteration introduced a mentorship program paired with targeted academic support, influenced by research on the role of mentorship in enhancing student

engagement. Continuous student feedback allowed real-time adjustments to mentorship and academic support components, as Cuddapah and Sayed (2019) and Hofkens and Ruzek (2019) suggested. Regular meetings with mentors provided operational insights, enabling continual refinement of approaches. Also, career exploration workshops developed with local businesses and higher education institutions in subsequent iterations ensured relevance and effectiveness. The iterative process adjusted formats and content based on student feedback, improving program quality and increasing student investment in their learning and future planning, as Miller et al. (2021) and MacDonald (2020) recommended.

Data analysis throughout each phase identified the most effective strategies and those needing modification or abandonment. Integrating mentorship with structured career-planning activities significantly boosted student engagement and academic performance, leading to a more comprehensive combination of these elements in later iterations, as Reschly (2020) highlighted. Challenges included initial resistance from some faculty members who were skeptical of new methods and frequent changes. Overcoming this required continuous dialogue and data presentation supporting the interventions' effectiveness, gradually shifting faculty skepticism to active participation, as Ruby and McLaughlin (2021) suggested. Community involvement evolved iteratively, with increasing engagement from parents and local leaders providing richer insights and additional support for students, as Le and Nguyen (2021) noted.

Addressing financial constraints involved an iterative approach to resource allocation. Demonstrating early successes and leveraging data to showcase potential

long-term benefits secured additional district funding, as Ramaley et al. (2023) suggested. This iterative financial planning ensured that resources were effectively allocated to the most impactful programs, maximizing student benefits. The final comprehensive model integrated academic support, mentorship, and career planning tailored to African American students' unique needs, exemplifying the iterative nature of improvement science.

In conclusion, the iterative improvement science approach guided efforts to enhance college and career readiness among African American high school students. This methodology highlighted the importance of flexibility, responsiveness to data, and stakeholder feedback inclusion in creating effective educational interventions, as Schleicher (2013) and Berridge et al. (2021) suggested. Committing to this continuous improvement cycle developed an effective program in the short term and a sustainable, adaptable framework for future cohorts, ensuring ongoing benefits from the work.

Reflecting on the Aim

At the outset of this study to increase college and career readiness among third-year African American high school students, our perspective was influenced mainly by traditional approaches that emphasized direct academic interventions. Initially, we sought to implement standardized academic support programs based on research that pointed to the diverse needs of students. However, our understanding of these students' requirements shifted as we collected quantitative data. We realized that their needs extended beyond traditional classroom learning, encompassing emotional and social support that directly

impacts educational outcomes, as echoed by Guetterman (2020) and Berridge et al. (2021).

Achieving the Intended Impact

As the study progressed, incorporating student feedback became increasingly central to our approach. This iterative feedback highlighted the importance of engagement and personal relevance in the learning process, as posited by Hofkens and Ruzek (2019). Students desired programs that connected academic content with real-world applications, leading us to integrate career exploration workshops aligned with their interests and future aspirations. This shift underscored the necessity of involving students in co-creating their educational experiences, fostering a more engaged and motivated learning environment.

Introducing place-based learning initiatives marked a further evolution in our perspective, guided by MacDonald's (2020) findings on high-impact educational practices. Students found greater relevance and engagement in their studies by connecting educational content to the local community and environment. This approach enhanced academic interest and fostered a stronger connection between students' educational pursuits and their community contexts, reinforcing the importance of education as a tool for community development and personal advancement.

Promoting critical collaborative work across educational settings became a key component of our improved approach. Research by Evans, Allen, and Turner (2023) showed that collaborative efforts lead to more sustainable and practical outcomes. Our partnerships with local businesses, higher education institutions, and community

organizations provided students practical experiences and networking opportunities, significantly improving their preparedness for post-secondary education and careers. These collaborations bridged the gap between academic knowledge and real-world application by offering ideas and experiences from the real world.

Potential for Meaningful Change in South Carolina

Our understanding of the critical role of ethnic identity in educational outcomes deepened throughout the study. Research by Miller, Akibar, and Nieman (2021) highlighted the positive impact of a strong ethnic identity on academic success among African American students. This insight led us to incorporate cultural competency into our curriculum and celebrate diverse identities within our educational programs, promoting students' pride and belonging and improving their academic engagement and performance.

As the study neared its latter stages, the importance of adaptive leadership in educational settings became apparent (Ramaley et al., 2023). The dynamic nature of educational environments and the unique challenges faced by African American students called for a leadership approach that was flexible and responsive to changing circumstances. This realization influenced our administrative strategies and helped us implement more responsive and effective educational reforms.

Ultimately, our perspective evolved to view educational interventions as part of a broader ecosystem involving students, educators, families, and the community. This holistic view, advocated by Schleicher (2013), recognized the interconnectedness of various factors influencing educational success. It led us to develop comprehensive

strategies addressing academic, emotional, social, and practical skills essential for lifelong success.

The research explored improving learning outcomes and comprehending the intricate interplay of factors influencing students' success. This journey served as a reminder of the need for an agile, comprehensive, and cooperative approach to education reform, as each research phase introduced fresh perspectives and modified our approaches to serve African American students' needs better and ensure their college and career readiness. This shift in viewpoint played a crucial role in creating a short-term successful, long-lasting, and flexible curriculum to meet changing needs in education.

Reflecting on the improvement science process throughout this study on enhancing college and career readiness among third-year African American high school students, it is clear that this approach fundamentally shaped both the methodology and outcomes of our research. The iterative nature of the Plan-Do-Study-Act (PDSA) cycle allowed us to adapt dynamically to the evolving needs and feedback of the students, ensuring that interventions remained relevant and practical. By systematically collecting quantitative data, we established a comprehensive understanding of the barriers to student success, guiding our strategies' continuous refinement, as stated by Johnson and Christensen (2020) and Ferretti and Hiebert (2017). This process improved direct interventions and enhanced our ability to foster an inclusive, supportive educational environment that acknowledged and addressed the broader socio-emotional needs of the students.

Ultimately, the study's conclusion marked a significant advancement in our understanding of effective educational practices for African American students, highlighting the critical need for adaptive and responsive strategies considering the complexities of their experiences and environments. Integrating community insights and aligning educational interventions with real-world applications proved vital in preparing these students for future challenges. Looking forward, the insights gained from this research journey underscore the importance of continuing to evolve educational strategies to meet the changing landscapes of student needs and educational reforms. The success of this project lays a solid foundation for future initiatives aimed at sustaining and expanding educational equity, ensuring that every student has the opportunity to achieve their fullest potential in college and beyond. This reflection on the improvement science process reaffirms the value of an iterative and collaborative approach and highlights the profound impact such methodologies can have on educational outcomes and reform.

Revisiting the Theory of Improvement

Evaluating the Theory of Improvement

To fully grasp the strategic direction of our educational initiative, aimed at significantly increasing the percentage of African American students graduating from high school ready for college or careers, it is essential to revisit the objectives detailed in Chapter 2. This goal addresses the historical disparities in educational outcomes faced by African American students, emphasizing structural injustices within the educational system. Research consistently shows these disparities are influenced by institutional, cultural, and socioeconomic factors disproportionately impacting African American

students, as stated by Ladson-Billings (2006), Ferguson (2003), and Ogbu (2004). Our initiative was committed to addressing these enduring issues by recognizing the challenges and aligning its objectives with broader national efforts to achieve educational equity. Ultimately, the strategy aims to enhance individual and community-wide social and economic well-being by improving college and career readiness among African American students.

The program emphasized targeted interventions and strategic actions, such as promoting culturally responsive teaching, which significantly enhanced engagement and educational outcomes for African American students. Equitable access to coursework and resources was also critical, helping close the academic opportunity gap. Additionally, mentorship programs provided essential guidance and support, aiding students throughout their educational journeys. Perna et al. (2008) and Gay (2000) suggest that these strategies collectively fostered a more inclusive and supportive educational environment in alignment with the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) mandates.

Modifications and Refinements

As our investigation continued, we discovered that our original hypothesis of improvement needed to be improved in light of real-world observations. At first, there was a focus on making direct academic inputs. However, when we examined quantitative data and student comments, we broadened our understanding of the requirements of the children, including social and emotional support. As a result, career exploration seminars and mentorship programs were incorporated, bringing academic content into line with students' long-term goals and practical applications.

We also introduced place-based learning initiatives, connecting educational content to the local community and environment, which enhanced student engagement and academic interest. As proposed by Evans, Allen, and Turner (2023) and MacDonald (2020), collaborative efforts across educational settings further refined our approach by tailoring learning environments to the unique needs of African American students, thereby increasing the relevance and impact of learning experiences.

Effectiveness in Guiding the Intervention

The theory of improvement effectively guided our interventions by promoting a holistic approach that considered academic, emotional, social, and practical needs. Implementing culturally responsive teaching and equitable access to coursework addressed educational disparities. Mentorship programs provided students with guidance and support, significantly improving their readiness for college and careers. Place-based learning initiatives and community engagement enhanced educational relevance and student motivation, fostering a stronger connection between students' academic pursuits and community contexts.

Sustainability and Future Revisions

The sustainability of our change initiative is promising, as evidenced by a significant 20% decrease in students needing more preparation for college or career readiness. Initially, 65% of the class of 2024 students were neither college nor career ready. That figure reduced to 44% post-intervention for the class of 2025. This notable improvement underscores the effectiveness of tailored interventions and highlights the capacity of well-designed educational programs to impact student outcomes substantially.

However, the interventions must be continuously revised to adapt to changing educational environments and student needs.

The initiative's success has already spread, influencing educational practices and policies in the district facing similar challenges. To ensure sustainability, the initiative emphasizes creating strong community support networks and involving local businesses, educational systems, and families in the educational process. This broad community involvement will help maintain the momentum of the educational reforms and ensure their long-term viability, as Reschly (2020) stated.

In conclusion, our idea of improvement has worked well for directing our efforts and producing noteworthy outcomes. Through integrating pragmatic perspectives and optimizing our approaches, we have established a strong foundation for enhancing African American students' preparedness for further education and the workforce. The project's success underscores the possibility of significant educational reform in South Carolina and elsewhere, highlighting the significance of flexibility, cooperation, and community involvement in attaining long-term educational parity.

Implications of Findings

Broader Implications for Similar Interventions

Stakeholders must adopt a multifaceted approach to significantly improve college and career readiness among African American high school graduates. This approach includes culturally responsive teaching, which involves educators recognizing and integrating students' cultural backgrounds into their teaching strategies, as suggested by Gay (2010) and Ladson-Billings (2006). Such practices have effectively enhanced

student engagement and success by affirming students' cultural identities within educational content. Effective implementation requires continuous professional development and a commitment to educational equity, ensuring these methods are integral to educational standards and curricula.

Furthermore, disaggregated data within school systems allows a focused strategy to address educational inequity. By examining student performance across various demographic groups, educators can pinpoint the unique requirements of minority students and furnish them with the required resources and assistance, as Baker (2020) stated. This data-driven approach supports policies that promote accountability and transparency—essential factors for successfully implementing systems that enhance educational outcomes for minority students.

Mentorship programs also play a vital role in supporting minority students toward achieving college and career readiness. Mentoring solid relationships has been linked with better educational outcomes, especially for students from underrepresented groups, as DuBois and Silverthorn (2005) and Epstein (2018) suggested. Schools should expand such programs, possibly collaborating with local businesses and community organizations, to provide diverse mentors from various careers and educational backgrounds. Community engagement expands learning opportunities beyond the classroom by giving students real-world experiences and support. By collaborating with local communities, schools can provide workshops, internships, and additional academic support to enhance classroom instruction and give students access to a comprehensive support network.

Implications for Educational Leadership

The endeavor to enhance college and career readiness among students significantly enriches the capacity of educational leadership by demanding a comprehensive understanding of varied educational contexts and student needs. This initiative necessitates leaders to foster an environment where continuous learning and adaptation are central to the educational strategy. Leadership in this realm involves navigating through complex challenges and spearheading the integration of innovative instructional practices that cater specifically to a diverse student population. Moreover, such leaders must cultivate strong collaborations among teachers, ensuring that professional development is frequent and deeply embedded in the cultural context of the students served, as suggested by Bryk et al. (2021), Gay (2010), and Darling-Hammond (2010).

As educational systems implement data-driven strategies to improve student outcomes, leaders learn the importance of utilizing detailed analytics to guide decision-making processes. This approach requires shifting from traditional leadership styles to more dynamic, evidence-based leadership where decisions are continually informed and adjusted based on real-time data. This enhances a leader's ability to identify issues swiftly and allocate resources more effectively to address gaps in education delivery. Furthermore, it develops their capability to predict future educational trends and readiness needs, adapting strategies to maintain or enhance educational outcomes.

Implications for Equity and Justice in Education

Programs to improve college and career readiness among African American high school students advance educational equity and justice. By offering students individualized support and resources, these initiatives, which align with the ACT's dedication to preparedness, aim to eliminate inequities (ACT, n.d.). This strategic focus guarantees a more equitable distribution of opportunities and gives students the tools to succeed in competitive labor markets and higher education. Comprehensive educational reform requires that educational systems create an environment that appreciates and encourages diversity and inclusion, which can only be achieved by openly addressing African American students' distinctive needs and cultural circumstances.

Teachers are critical in successfully implementing college and career readiness programs, significantly influencing their professional development and instructional strategies. Endorsed by the American School Counselor Association (2018), these types of programs equip educators with frameworks and competencies that prioritize holistic student development, essential for effectively addressing the needs of African American students. This professional growth enhances teachers' skills and deepens their understanding of and responsiveness to their students' cultural and socio-economic backgrounds, fostering a more inclusive and effective educational environment. The enriched understanding helps teachers to connect better with their students, leading to improved educational outcomes.

The broader community also greatly benefits from its younger members' enhanced college and career readiness. As students gain access to higher education and improved employment prospects, they contribute positively to the socio-economic

development of their communities. This upward mobility is essential for breaking cycles of poverty and addressing systemic inequalities, as Baker (2020) and Brey (2019) noted. The resultant enhanced educational outcomes increase community engagement and drive developmental initiatives, fostering a cycle of empowerment and positive change that benefits everyone.

Relating Findings to Existing Literature and Theories

The study's synthesis of data and theoretical frameworks reveals a close relationship between accepted ideas and contemporary educational methods, emphasizing the significance of cultural capital for academic performance. This data underscores cultural capital's crucial role in improving African American students' educational paths. The initiative to increase college and career readiness among African American high school graduates addresses disparities in cultural capital, proving a dedication to providing students with the resources they need to succeed. These programs recognize existing educational disparities and actively work to create more accessible and balanced programs for underrepresented groups, improving the educational environment.

Exploring social capital, the findings resonate with Coleman's (1988) research on the benefits of parental involvement and community engagement in educational outcomes. The analysis confirms that community partnerships, which integrate resources, effectively extend social capital to students, thereby improving their educational outcomes. This effective utilization of social networks underscores their importance as vital pathways to accessing educational resources and succeeding within the academic sphere. Strategic partnerships enhance educational experiences and future opportunities

for students, aligning well with theoretical models of social capital in educational success.

The results corroborate the theory and policy approaches that show the need for systemic educational reforms. These reforms push for significant alterations to educational frameworks to promote effectiveness and equity for all. The analysis shows how fair educational settings that enhance college and job readiness require institutional and legislative changes, especially for underrepresented populations. This is consistent with sociological theories of educational reform that demand structural changes at the root level to address long-standing and systemic educational inequalities.

The applied methodology aligns with Creswell's (2014) rigorous approaches, primarily using disaggregated data to design educational interventions. This tactic links theoretical frameworks to real-world applications, strengthening the findings' dependability and highlighting the significance of data-driven decision-making in the educational process. Customizing interventions to fit the individual needs of African American students can make educational practices equal and practical, allowing all children to succeed.

Drawing on the theories of Farrington et al. (2012), the approach highlights the crucial role of non-cognitive elements in student performance. It is becoming widely acknowledged that grit, persistence, and self-control are essential to students' growth. Education programs focusing on these soft skills are critical because they set students up for success in college and beyond by preparing them academically, emotionally, and

psychologically. These programs emphasize developing these traits to ensure comprehensive student development.

The targeted interventions address educational disparities and broader societal challenges by applying critical race theory, mainly through Ladson-Billings (1994) and Ogbu (2004). This approach advocates for an educational strategy that is deeply aware of and responsive to students' racial and cultural contexts, aligning theoretical perspectives with practical educational needs. These targeted interventions consider the societal and cultural challenges influencing African American students' educational paths.

Integrating experiential learning opportunities reflects constructivist learning theories, as Brooks and Brooks (1993) detailed. Providing students with practical applications of their classroom learning through real-world experiences embodies the constructivist principle that knowledge is best constructed through active engagement. These opportunities connect theoretical learning with practical application, enhancing the educational experience and preparing students for real-world challenges. Practical experiences enrich the theoretical knowledge gained in the classroom.

The focus on college and career advising programs underscores structured guidance's importance in educational outcomes, aligning with developmental psychology and counseling practices, as Curry and Milsom (2017) discussed. Effective advising is crucial for equipping students with the tools to navigate the complexities of postsecondary education and career planning. This emphasis on advising highlights the theoretical importance of multiple support systems in educational settings, ensuring students are well-prepared for future challenges.

Parental involvement is crucial in enhancing college and career readiness, drawing from socio-ecological development models, as Epstein (2018) suggested. These models highlight the influence of family and community on students' educational experiences. Engaging parents and families in the educational process supports students' academic journeys and reinforces the practical application of developmental theories in creating supportive educational environments. Parental involvement is a vital component of a supportive educational framework.

Finally, the implications for further study and application emphasize adaptive tactics in teaching, highlighting how dynamic the field of education is. The theories of Fullan (2014) regarding responsive and systemic adjustments stress the need for continuous modifications and flexibility in teaching methods. The methods used to address college and career readiness must evolve with educational opportunities and demands. This forward-looking viewpoint is necessary to ensure educational systems remain relevant and adequate in facing current and future challenges.

Contributions to Research and Practice

Contributions to the Existing Body of Knowledge

This study on improving college and career readiness among African American high school students contributes significantly to the current discourse on educational equity and access to future opportunities. By focusing on the unique challenges faced by this group, the research advances our understanding of their specific obstacles and aligns with broader goals of educational justice. This study builds on Baker's (2020) emphasis

on disaggregating learning data to evaluate and enhance readiness initiatives for African American students, addressing a crucial gap in existing research.

Expanding on Bornstein's (2013) exploration of cultural factors in academic performance, this study examines how culturally responsive teaching practices can specifically enhance African American students' readiness for postsecondary education. The findings provide new insights into practical methods for integrating students' cultural backgrounds into the curriculum, improving their educational experiences and outcomes. Our research also extends Bragg and Taylor's (2014) analysis of college and career readiness models by systematically evaluating these models' effectiveness for African American students. This targeted analysis fills a gap in the literature, offering evidence-based recommendations for instructional strategies that enhance readiness among this demographic.

Addressing Gaps in the Literature

The study addressed several critical gaps in the literature. First, it provides a detailed evaluation of how culturally responsive pedagogy can be tailored to improve African American students' college and career readiness, responding to Bornstein's (2013) call for more specific strategies. By integrating culturally responsive teaching methods into the curriculum, the study offers practical applications that educators can adopt to support African American students better.

As Baker (2020) pointed out, our research thus highlights how crucial it is to have disaggregated data to recognize and cater to the particular requirements of African American students. This method enables more focused interventions, guaranteeing that

instructional tactics are adapted to these students' unique difficulties. By determining which college and career readiness models perform best for African American students, the study expands on the work of Bragg and Taylor (2014). It offers a more nuanced understanding that requires improvement in more extensive educational studies.

Opportunities for Future Research

Future studies should examine how culturally sensitive instruction affects African American students' long-term achievement in postsecondary education and the workforce. Studies that follow students over time may yield important insights into how these activities affect their learning paths. Educational policies and practices could be further improved by conducting comparative studies of college and job readiness models specifically designed for African American students. Furthermore, investigating how school counselors may improve this demographic's preparedness could provide essential insights into efficient support networks. Additionally, studies should look into how African American students particularly benefit from experiential learning experiences, as discussed by Carroll and Piro (2020). This may result in more inclusive and encouraging experiential learning initiatives that meet their particular requirements.

Practical Implications for Educators and Practitioners

Our research has several applications for educators and professionals. First, as Baker (2020) noted, integrating disaggregated data analysis into instructional methodologies enables focused interventions that cater to the unique requirements of African American pupils. Teachers can use this strategy to create specialized curricula that enhance students' academic achievement and prepare them for postsecondary study.

Additionally, putting Gay's (2010) recommended culturally responsive teaching strategies into practice can significantly improve student achievement and engagement. In order to create a more welcoming and encouraging learning environment, educators can incorporate historical and cultural allusions pertinent to African American communities into their lessons.

In addition, additional experiential learning opportunities like job shadowing and internships must be offered in coordination with neighborhood companies and civic associations. Students gain valuable skills and connections to the real world through these experiences, which improves their preparedness for college and careers. The particular needs of African American pupils should be the main topic of instruction for teachers and school counselors. Comprehensive counselor education programs must incorporate techniques for assisting students from underrepresented backgrounds and addressing the unique obstacles they encounter when pursuing higher education, as recommended by Curry and Milsom (2017, 2022).

Finally, as Darling-Hammond (2010) pointed out, our analysis favors implementing school-wide policies that advance educational equity. Regardless of their background, school officials may utilize these findings to support policies that guarantee all students have access to the coursework and resources needed for success in postsecondary education. In conclusion, by including the perspectives of several academics and filling in significant gaps in the literature, this study makes a significant contribution to the area. In order to guarantee that African American pupils acquire the

assistance they require to achieve in college and their jobs, it provides educators and practitioners with valuable applications.

Recommendations for Practice and Policy

Closing educational and economic gaps requires improving African American high school students' college and career preparation (CCR). A systematic, multidimensional approach that considers the many requirements of these children is needed for this endeavor. Aside from early CCR standard implementation, family and community engagement, experiential learning, and addressing non-financial hurdles, effective CCR programs must be flexible and culturally sensitive.

Early implementation of CCR standards starting in the ninth grade is crucial. The American School Counselor Association (2018) emphasizes introducing robust K–12 CCR standards early to help students develop essential skills and mindsets for academic and career success. This proactive approach ensures that students are equipped with the tools to navigate postsecondary challenges and opportunities from the onset of high school.

Engaging families and communities in the educational process is vital for closing achievement gaps disproportionately affecting African American students. Positive teacher attitudes and enhanced parental involvement significantly improve student outcomes (Ferguson, 2003; Hill and Tyson, 2009). Programs that include parent-teacher meetings, workshops, and at-home educational activities strengthen the connection between home and school, creating a supportive network that empowers students.

Internships, apprenticeships, and project-based learning are examples of experiential learning opportunities crucial for bridging the gap between academic theory and practical application. Carroll and Piro (2020) highlight how these encounters help students grasp academic ideas and form meaningful connections with business leaders. Students who participate in experiential learning are more motivated and engaged, which improves academic achievement and prepares them for the workforce.

Addressing non-financial barriers is also crucial for improving college success rates among African American students. According to Dynarski et al. (2022), targeted support services like mentoring and academic advising are essential for overcoming obstacles such as inadequate academic preparation, limited access to college information, and social and psychological barriers. These services provide guidance and support that resonate with students' experiences and challenges, enhancing their preparedness for college and careers.

Data-driven decision-making is also necessary for CCR programs to be effective. By breaking down student data, educators can better identify and close equity gaps and develop interventions specifically designed to suit the needs of African American kids (Baker, 2020). This strategy results in more individualized learning opportunities and improved support for students with academic or social difficulties.

Culturally sensitive teaching is an additional essential element. Cultural allusions incorporated into the curriculum foster a more accepting and encouraging learning atmosphere, which raises student interest and boosts academic achievement (Gay, 2010). This approach values and respects the children's cultural origins, helping them develop a

feeling of identification and belonging that is essential to their self-assurance and sustained involvement in the classroom.

Implementing these strategies requires a collaborative effort among educators, administrators, and policymakers. Early interventions, family and community engagement, experiential learning, addressing non-financial barriers, data-driven decision-making, and culturally responsive teaching must all be integrated into CCR programs. Darling-Hammond and Cook-Harvey (2018) argue that comprehensive educational reforms need systemic support and alignment at all levels of governance. Bryk et al. (2021) emphasize that collaboration across different sectors fosters continuous improvement in educational practice, ensuring that initiatives are implemented and adapted based on feedback and evolving educational needs.

Educators and policymakers may improve CCR for African American high school students by implementing these doable suggestions and legislation measures. This integrated strategy aims to address systemic gaps, establish long-term success for all students, and create an equal learning environment.

Conclusion

In summary, improving African American high school students' college and career readiness (CCR) is an essential component of continuous improvement and a critical component of educational reform. We can start to remove the structural obstacles that lead to the alarming trend of African American students leaving high school neither college nor career ready by concentrating on specialized, culturally sensitive approaches that cater to the unique requirements of these students. This issue is critical to educational

equity and community vitality since it affects these students' individual prospects and the larger socioeconomic environment.

Key takeaways from this study emphasized the importance of early intervention with comprehensive CCR standards, as advocated by the American School Counselor Association (2018), and the integration of families and communities into the educational process to support student success, as highlighted by Ferguson (2003) and Hill and Tyson (2009). The role of experiential learning in bridging the gap between academic theory and real-world practice cannot be overstated, with Carroll and Piro (2020) underscoring how such experiences enrich understanding and foster essential skills. Moreover, addressing non-financial barriers through targeted support services like mentoring and academic advising, as noted by Dynarski et al. (2022), is critical for removing obstacles to higher education and career entry.

By revisiting the initial problem of practice—that a large percentage of African American high school students are graduating unprepared for the following stages of their academic and professional lives—we see the urgency of implementing effective CCR programs. These programs are essential for individual achievement and nurturing a generation of well-prepared, resilient individuals who can thrive in and contribute to a diverse, dynamic society. Therefore, the continuation and expansion of such studies are essential for driving forward the changes needed to achieve accurate educational equity.

Put another way, creating an atmosphere where African American students may succeed requires incorporating families and communities into educational practices. According to empirical research presented by Hill and Tyson (2009), parental

participation significantly increases student achievement. This finding is consistent with Ferguson's (2003) findings regarding the beneficial effects of inclusive and supportive teacher attitudes. These connections build a support system for students beyond academic accomplishment to address their emotional and social needs, which are vital to their success.

Incorporating culturally responsive teaching approaches into CCR programs also presents a significant opportunity to address educational disparities. Making the curriculum relevant and mainly exciting depends on these behaviors, which require acknowledging and respecting the students' cultural backgrounds (Gay, 2010). The tendency of underprepared graduates must be immediately countered by raising student engagement and retention rates, which is made possible by this relevance. Teaching sensitive to cultural differences helps African American students succeed academically and develop a sense of identity and belonging, all of which are critical for their self-assurance and sustained involvement in the classroom.

It is impossible to exaggerate the significance of data-driven decision-making in this situation. Teachers and legislators can improve how they fulfill African American students' needs by methodically reviewing the results and input from CCR projects. The concept of continual improvement is endorsed by Bryk et al. (2021), who also highlights the importance of evidence-based modifications in educational practices and iterative learning. By doing such thorough evaluations, CCR programs can develop over time to become more effective and maintain alignment with the dynamics of the educational landscape and the requirements of students.

In summary, the research on rising CCR among African American high school students provides essential new information on the prospects and obstacles of educational change. This study emphasizes the importance of a comprehensive strategy that includes experiential learning, family and community involvement, early intervention, and culturally sensitive instruction. Putting such all-encompassing strategies into practice can significantly increase African American students' college and career readiness, promoting justice and equity in society. The study's conclusions serve as a call to action for all parties engaged in the educational process, demanding ongoing cooperation and creativity to guarantee that every student has the tools and assistance they require to succeed.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A

CCR OPTIONS

CCR Prep Options

1. Apex Tutorials (English, Math & Reading Only)

- ClassLink
- Students work independently.
- Pretest
 - Learn It - Notes & CFU questions
 - Try It - Practice Problems
 - Review It - Brief video
 - Test It - By Section
- Posttest
- Test Taking Strategies Available
- Getting Started Guide
- gsg_student_tutorials.pdf (Student Guide)

***Makeup hours after school - seat time recovery with additional work related to material**

It should be for independent work ONLY.

2. Progress Learning (English, Math, Reading & Science) - formerly USA Test Prep

- ClassLink
- Teachers/Admin can share, create, or use premade assessments.
 - Students can be assigned remediation for standards not mastered (< 80%) - 10 practice problems
 - Video lessons & practice problems are available in the Study Plan/Focus Area
- Students can work on weak areas in their Study Plan or on assignments created by the teacher.
- Teachers/Admin can create assignments, including assessments, premade practice tests, video lessons, practice problems, and constructed response questions.
- A variety of reports are available.

- 5 premium assessments are available
- [Help Center Articles](#) and [Training Webinars On-Demand & Live](#)

<https://docs.progresslearning.com/hubfs/Flyers/High%20School/SAT%20and%20ACT%20Prep%20Flyer.pdf>

<https://docs.progresslearning.com/hubfs/Alek%20-%20temp/PL%20-%20Supporting%20Secondary%20Students%20and%20Beyond.pdf>

3. Study Island (English, Math, Reading & Science)

- ClassLink -> Study Island -> US Programs -> ACT
- Lesson - Notes & Video
- Practice - Mastery is $\geq 70\%$
- Game Mode Practice
- Students can work independently, or teachers may give assignments.
- Test Taking Strategies Available
- [Getting Started Information](#)

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Preparation Options for the **SAT® & ACT®** Assessments

We know that college entrance exam preparation is a big undertaking for educators and students alike. But, even so, if you're proactive in your preparation efforts with students, you can all go into test day feeling calm and confident. And, with the right tools, designing a rigorous and effective SAT and ACT test preparation program for your learners doesn't have to be a Herculean effort.

- Individualized** preparation that identifies knowledge gaps and provides aligned instruction
- Comprehensive** preparation that provides instruction on assessed topics
- Targeted** preparation that lets students practice their skills
- Assessment-driven learning paths** to close skill gaps
- Robust SAT or ACT test preparation courses**
- Practice opportunities** to build students' confidence

Edmentum Programs Aligned to SAT and ACT Assessments

- Edmentum Assessments**
Our assessments provide you with the tools needed to understand students' baseline competencies and monitor progress.
 - Three comparable fixed tests for each subject area of the SAT and ACT Assessments
 - Automatically generated individualized learning paths
 - High-quality curriculum to address skill gaps
- Courseware**
Our online SAT and ACT test preparation courses are built on a solid instructional design that focuses on both the acquisition and retention of knowledge.
 - An in-depth course for each subject area of the SAT and ACT Assessments
 - Structured curriculum that addresses the topics covered on the assessments
 - Integrated assessments that allow learners to move past content they have already mastered
- Study Island**
Our customizable practice and preparation solution gives students the opportunity to test their knowledge on practice SAT and ACT questions.
 - A large bank of practice items aligned to the topics covered on the SAT and ACT Assessments
 - Test-taking strategy guides and videos for each subject area of both tests
 - Built-in lessons to review tested concepts

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4. NEW: Horizon Education DCSD ACT Curriculum (English, Math, Reading & Science & Writing)

- Schoology Assessments with premade a Google Slides presentation & video for each topic

- Questions are available at the end of each category
- Other practice sets are available
- 3 Full-Length Practice Assessments Available
- Test Taking Strategies Available
- Teacher-led or students may work independently
- Horizon content should be used with ACT prep sessions like ACT prep courses, advisory classes, after-school enhancement programs, etc.
- Materials should be copied from the Schoology ACT Horizon Curriculum group to the teacher course as needed.
- **Contact Ford or Skaris with the teacher's names to add materials.**

5. Math Nation (Math Only)

- ClassLink -> Math Nation -> Change the dropdown to ACT Prep
- 5 week Study Plan Suggestion
 - Overview or detailed video for each topic
 - 3 practice problems with video explanation
 - Check for understanding - 3 questions completed & checked in Math Nation
- Teacher-led or students may work independently.
- Possible for a prep course

Recommendation

- **Weekly Rotation of activities - 2 days of extra help**
 - **ACT (Tuesday), Career Readiness (WIN), 2 Extra Help (Tutoring), Advisory**
 - **ACT Tuesday can go into classes with Horizon materials.**
 - **Cross-disciplinary areas to integrate ACT review**

Appendix B

Student and Teacher Survey Questions

Your input and feedback are crucial in helping us assess and improve our College and Career Readiness Program. This survey is designed to gather your valuable insights on college and career readiness knowledge and your experiences with the program. Your responses will help us understand your perspectives, expectations, and needs concerning college and career readiness. Your input will contribute to enhancing the effectiveness and inclusivity of our program. Please take a few moments to complete this survey thoughtfully and honestly. Your responses are anonymous, and your candid feedback is greatly appreciated. Together, we can work towards providing the best possible support for your educational and career aspirations.

1. Please indicate your role:
 - a. Student
 - b. Teacher
2. How important do you think college and career readiness is for graduating high school students?
 1. Very Important
 2. Important
 3. Somewhat Important
 4. Not Important
3. What aspect of college and career readiness do you believe is most crucial?
 1. Academic preparation
 2. Career exploration
 3. Financial planning
 4. Soft skills development
4. Have you attended any college and career readiness workshops or seminars?
 1. Yes, frequently.
 2. Yes, occasionally.
 3. No, but I'm interested.
 4. No, and I'm not interested.
5. Which of the following best describes your current level of knowledge about the college readiness processes/requirements?
 1. Very knowledgeable
 2. Moderately knowledgeable
 3. Somewhat knowledgeable
 4. Not knowledgeable at all
6. Which of the following best describes your current level of knowledge about the career readiness processes/requirements?
 1. Very knowledgeable

2. Moderately knowledgeable
 3. Somewhat knowledgeable
 4. Not knowledgeable at all
7. What resources have you found most helpful for college and career guidance?
1. School counselors
 2. Online resources
 3. Workshops and guest speakers
 4. Family and friends
8. After participating in the CCR class, how confident are you in your ability to make informed career choices?
1. Very confident
 2. Confident
 3. Somewhat confident
 4. Not confident at all
9. After participating in the CCR class, what skills or qualities do you believe are most important for success in college and the workplace?
1. Technical skills
 2. Communication skills
 3. Problem-solving skills
 4. Adaptability and resilience
10. How do you plan to finance your college education or career training?
1. Scholarships and grants
 2. Student loans
 3. Part-time work
 4. Not sure
11. Are internships or work experience essential for career readiness?
1. Absolutely essential
 2. Important but not essential
 3. Not very important
 4. Not important at all
12. Which of the following do you believe is the biggest obstacle to college and career readiness for students?
1. Lack of access to resources
 2. Financial constraints
 3. Lack of motivation
 4. Other (please specify)
13. How satisfied are you with the College and Career Readiness Program?
1. Very Satisfied
 2. Satisfied
 3. Neutral
 4. Dissatisfied
 5. Very Dissatisfied
14. What aspects of the program do you find most beneficial? (Select all that apply)
1. Academic preparation

2. Career exploration
 3. Skill-building workshops
 4. Guest speakers and industry experts
 5. College application guidance
 6. Other (please specify)
15. How well does the program prepare students for their future education and career goals?
1. Extremely well
 2. Well
 3. Moderately well
 4. Not very well
 5. Not at all well
16. Is the 30-minute daily duration of the program sufficient for its objectives?
1. Yes, it's adequate.
 2. No, it should be longer.
 3. No, it should be shorter.
 4. Not sure
17. Have you noticed any improvements in college and career readiness skills since participating in the program?
1. Yes, significant improvements.
 2. Yes, some improvements.
 3. No noticeable improvements.
 4. Not applicable
18. How would you rate the diversity and inclusivity of the program in terms of race and ethnicity?
1. Excellent
 2. Good
 3. Fair
 4. Poor
 5. Very Poor
19. Have you encountered any specific challenges or concerns related to the program?
(Select all that apply)
1. Lack of resources
 2. Insufficient time
 3. Insufficient curriculum diversity
 4. Lack of engagement
 5. Other (please specify)
20. Do you believe the College and Career Readiness Program should be made available to all students, regardless of their future career aspirations?
1. Yes, it should be mandatory for all students.
 2. Yes, but it should be optional.
 3. No, it should only be for students interested in specific careers.
 4. Not sure

Thank you for participating in this survey! Your feedback is valuable in assessing the effectiveness and inclusivity of the College and Career Readiness Program.