Factors that Influence Students' Desires to Attend Higher Education

Shawn Lea Temple
Seton Hall University
FACTORs THAT INFLUENCE STUDENTS' DESIRES TO ATTEND HIGHER EDUCATION

By

SHAWN LEA TEMPLE

Dissertation Committee

Rebecca D. Cox, Ph.D. Mentor
Christopher Tienken, Ed.D.
Roberta Devlin-Scherer, Ed.D.

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment
Of the Requirements for the Degree
Doctor of Education
Seton Hall University

2009
APPROVAL FOR SUCCESSFUL DEFENSE

Doctoral Candidate, Shawn Temple, has successfully defended and made the required modifications to the text of the doctoral dissertation for the Ed.D. during this Summer Semester 2009.

DISSERTATION COMMITTEE
(please sign and date beside your name)

Mentor:
Dr. Rebecca Cox
[Signature] 8.27.09

Committee Member:
Dr. Christopher Tienken
[Signature] 6.12.09

Committee Member:
Dr. Roberta Devlin-Scherer
[Signature] 6.17.09

External Reader:

The mentor and any other committee members who wish to review revisions will sign and date this document only when revisions have been completed. Please return this form to the Office of Graduate Studies, where it will be placed in the candidate’s file and submit a copy with your final dissertation to be bound as page number two.
Factors that Influence Students' Desires to Attend Higher Education

© Copyrighted by Shawn Lea Temple, 2009
All Rights Reserved
Students’ Desires to Attend Higher Education

Abstract

The purpose of this study was to determine the factors that influenced students’ decision about higher education. Through working with students and staff at Rosa Parks High School, an urban high school with predominately African American students, the research team, of one faculty member and six graduate students, was able to gain information about how students come to their decision about college.

The study was a descriptive study that used qualitative methods. Over a two-year period, the research team focused on various aspects within the school. The data that was collected was through questionnaires, writing prompts, focus group interviews, and administrative interviews. This allowed researchers to gain a better understanding of students and the elements that assist or hinder their advancement into college. There were six main reasons that students did not continue their education. Socioeconomic status, cultural and social capital, family structure and expectations, financial reasons, and the general organization of the high school offered some insight as to why students did not attend college. During the interviews it was also determined that the expectations between the administration and staff and those of the students were dissimilar.

After the research was coded and analyzed, it was determined that the main reasons students did not go onto college were because of the lack of guidance support and the lack of general college knowledge. Many students from this school lacked the basic information about college expectations and college application procedures. While students did have the predisposition and desire to attend institutions of higher education, they often did not know how to get there.
Students’ Desires to Attend Higher Education

Schools need to be more vigilant of the needs of their students. Often, guidance departments become overwhelmed with discipline and scheduling issues. It is necessary for college guidance to occur within the school curriculum and the school as a whole. Schools need to maintain a college-going behavior throughout the staff and students at the school.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Throughout this journey, my mentor Rebecca Cox Ph.D., has been a sense of support and encouragement. Her dedication, passion and generosity have been inspirational. I truly have grown as a person and as an educator because of her guidance over the past two years. My committee members, Dr. Christopher Tienken and Dr. Devlin-Scherer, have provided enriching feedback that has encouraged me to further my skills as a writer and as a researcher. Your insightfulness and patience is greatly appreciated.

To my step-mother, Margy McCay and my dearest friend, Stacey Langroth. Thank you for the love over the past years. Whether it was listening to my stories or editing my work, you both have been a core of strength for me during the process.

I would like to give special thanks to the Boston clan, Seton Hall Cohort IV and my teaching colleagues who have patiently and lovingly supported me through this process. You all have been such a wonderful source of reassurance and comfort during this adventure.
Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated in loving memory to my parents, Robert Wickliffe Temple and Margaret Lorraine Temple. Thank you for giving me the strength, courage, determination and passion to pursue my goals and dreams. I miss you and love you both.
## Table of Contents

Absiact ........................................................................................................ iii
Acknowledgement ..................................................................................... v
Dedication ................................................................................................. vi

Chapter I THE PROBLEM AND PROCEDURES ........................................ 1

Problem Statement ................................................................................... 8
Purpose ..................................................................................................... 9
Additional Research Questions ............................................................... 9
Methodology ............................................................................................ 11
The Site ................................................................................................... 11
Participants .............................................................................................. 12
Data Collection ........................................................................................ 12
Data Analysis ........................................................................................... 13
Purpose/Significance ................................................................................ 14
Organization of the Dissertation ............................................................. 15

Chapter II REVIEW OF LITERATURE .................................................... 16

Methodology with Terminology ............................................................... 17
Socioeconomic Status ............................................................................. 19
Social Capital and Cultural Capital ........................................................ 22
Family Structure and Expectation ........................................................... 27
Financing College ................................................................................... 30
High School Organization ..................................................................... 33
Curriculum .............................................................................................. 34
College Guidance ................................................................................... 36
Access to Higher Education .................................................................. 38
Summary ................................................................................................. 39

Chapter III METHODOLOGY .................................................................... 44

Design and Methods ................................................................................ 44
Participants ............................................................................................. 45
Site ......................................................................................................... 48
Data ......................................................................................................... 51
Writing Prompts ..................................................................................... 53
College Fair Questionnaires ................................................................. 55
Interviews ............................................................................................... 57
Interviews with Administration and Faculty ........................................... 57
Administration ......................................................................................... 57
List of Tables

Table 1 Number of Participants in focus Groups ..............................................47
Table 2 Student College Choices in Past Years .............................................50
Table 3 Student Responses from the College Fair .......................................56
Table 4 Students in Focus Group 1 and 2 .......................................................62
Table 5 Students in Focus Groups 3, 4, and 5 .............................................62
Table 6 Students in Focus Groups 6, 7, and 8 .............................................63
Table 7 Coding Headings .............................................................................65
Table 8 Second Coding Headings .................................................................65
Table 9 Students Future Plans .....................................................................72
CHAPTER I
THE PROBLEM AND PROCEDURES

Education has the ability to influence students' choices in life. Through guidance counselors, teachers and peers, parents, and community members, students can gain educational aspirations, social capital, and cultural capital that might not otherwise be afforded to them at home or in the community (Finn, 2006; Hossler, Schmit & Vesper, 1999; Phelan, Locke-Davidson, & Yu, 1998).

Although the societal issues will never lead to a level playing field, at minimum, the education can provide an opportunity for individuals to enhance themselves individually, educationally, and socio-economically. While it cannot eliminate the social concerns that may affect an ethnic or racial group in this country, by infusing knowledge regarding higher education in the high school forum, students are allowed access to information to which they would not necessarily be exposed.

Even though students may be provided with education, alternate factors throughout their lives can prevent them from participating in opportunities beyond high school. Social concerns such as low-birth weight, parental education levels, and access to resources and experiences limit students' foundation of knowledge when they enter the school system. With the correct support and access to college information, students have the opportunities to get beyond the social concerns.

Education is one area that can provide knowledge and opportunity to students. Even though African American students attend college at lower rates, if the necessary knowledge is imparted to them regarding college expectations and general college
knowledge, then perhaps more African American students of lower socioeconomic status would partake the opportunities available to them. There remains dissimilarity between races and class with regards to transition into higher education. The National Center for Educational Statistics (NCES) (2007) estimates that in 2006, 55.5% of Black students and 68.5% of White students attend college immediately after high school graduation.

Regarding social class, in 2006, low-socioeconomic status students were 30% less likely to attend college than their high-socioeconomic status peers (NCES, 2007). With this discrepancy, it is necessary to determine what factors influence low-socioeconomic status Black students in their college choices. Perhaps with this data, policy changes could be made to promote continued education and an increase in socioeconomic status for the individuals of lower- socioeconomic status.

This discrepancy in education is only adding to the economic divide that is occurring in this country. Except for a short period in the 1990’s, economic inequality has been growing for nearly 30 years (Boushey & Weller, 2005; Lardner & Smith, 2005). In a press release in 2002, the median income for White households was about $48,000 whereas for Black households the median was $30,000 US dollars (Census Bureau Reports, 2004). This gap in earning suggests the need for additional educational advancement among Black youth. Economic disparities lead to a class difference as well. According to the Brookings Institute (Isaacs, 2007), 54% of Black children born to parents in the lower socioeconomic status classification remain in the lower class compared to 31% of their White peers. A college degree would assist these African American children to excel and surpass their family in socioeconomic and class status.
If more students of low-socioeconomic status earn advanced degrees, it could increase their probability of earning more income, and thus enhance their social status. According to the United States Census Bureau Report (2007b), adults with advanced degrees earn four times more than those with less than a high school diploma. For example, adults who have obtained a bachelor's degree earned an average of $54,689 in 2005 compared to those who earned a high school diploma, who earned $29,448. If more students in urban areas attended and completed college, their income and opportunities might increase.

Students of low socioeconomic status are often faced with multiple obstacles unknown to their more affluent counterparts. These impediments, specifically those related to socioeconomic status, often hinder the college process for many students (Bloom, 2007; Louie, 2007). Low socioeconomic status students are not transitioning into 2-year or 4-year colleges at the same rate as higher socioeconomic status students and for this reason, it is necessary to determine what factors students think about when making decision related to higher education.

It is evident that the college attendance rate is particularly low in inner cities where minority students, such as African-Americans and Latinos, are heavily concentrated, and it is unclear why this is so. There could be various reasons students do not continue their educational path into higher education. Schools are often criticized for not preparing students for the transition into college (McDonough, 1997; Hossler, Schmit, & Vesper, 1999). A second reason offered to explain the lack of college attendance is students lack motivation when it comes to college (Gladieux & Swail, 1998).
Some factors that influence students' college choices are their own socio-economic status and their own social and cultural capital, along with those of their peers and community members. Additionally, high school experiences, such as interactions with teachers and administrators, as well as academic preparedness are influences for the students. While students have influences in the educational realm, they are also influenced by their community and family relationships. These elements are all factors when students decide whether or not to attend college. The study examines whether these elements are prevalent in students’ decisions about college. Hopefully, with this information, it will allow college and high schools to rectify the inequality in colleges today.

There are many social and cultural elements that contribute to college choice. Many students identify closely with their race and culture. More specifically, the students’ social class shapes the experiences and choices that they make in and out of the classroom (Bloom, 2007). As students progress through their educational career, they become more aware of their environment and how this environment influences their decisions. Students gain an understanding of social class and race as early and 10th grade and this knowledge distinctively shapes a family’s college planning (Hearn, 1984). Moreover, the social and cultural capital that the students experience, both at home and at school, shape their understanding of college and education in general.

Both social capital and cultural capital are important when understanding the influences on adolescents and their decisions regarding college. Cultural capital is a student’s background and its influence on the adolescent’s decisions. While each class has its own form of cultural capital, students learn that cultural capital is most significant
when it is turned into economic and social capital (McDonough, 1997). Many individuals look to enhance their social capital. Students of lower classes attempt to gain cultural capital and social capital equal to that of their middle and upper class counterparts (McDonough, 1997).

Many students in urban neighborhoods understand that they have a chance to have more opportunities afforded to them if they continue onto college outside of their urban neighborhood. However, their lack of social and cultural capital puts them at a disadvantage and for this reason they often lack the knowledge about college and the expectations of institutions of higher education. Without guidance from a counselor, teacher, or a family member, many students fear leaving their comfort zone and therefore, end up remaining in the same setting.

Students often associate themselves with other individuals who have experienced the same cultural and social experiences. Students look for college settings that are consistent or similar to their own environment and culture. Often students model their college going behaviors after parents and relatives who have attended college in the past. If students are exposed to other individuals, such as peers or relatives, who have made the pilgrimage through the college transition, students will often rely on those individual for guidance.

Students who do not have family members who have attended college often look towards the school as their main support. For this reason, the expectations held by the high school, influences the students' transition choices. This study will use a population from Rosa Parks High School to examine influences on college aspirations of students. McDonough (2004) cited four major features that influenced college transitions for high
school students: (a) A college preparatory curriculum that challenged them; (b) a college culture that included high academic standards and formal and informal communication related to college choice and transition; (c) a staff devoted to college transition and higher education; (d) a staff available for advising and counseling students who were attending college (p. 9). The school creates the environment closest to the college setting for these students. If no one is available at home to discuss college information, the school must take on that role.

Some schools however, are not equipped or do not have the organizational structure to support a college-going culture. For example, many students who are disadvantaged or minorities often get placed in tracks that are of a vocational style as opposed to a more of an academic curriculum (Goldrick-Rab, 2007; Kirst & Venezia, 2004) and are not provided with information about college. Students who are not in college preparatory classes often lack the guidance that their peers obtain in the school. The academic level of coursework typically determines how a students will perform on a college level (Goldrick-Rab, 2007). Rosa Parks High School is one of these schools that has various curriculum tracks for the students. While overt tracking is illegal (Hobson v. Hansen, 1967) covert systems of tracking remain a common practice among schools. Many of the students at Rosa Parks High School were placed into vocational programs that do not prepare them for college.

Even if the schools are not tracked, many college bound student of lower SES are not receiving the same rigorous training as their middle or upper-class peers (Carnevale & Rose, 2004; Deli-Amen & Turley, 2007; McDonough, 2004; Oakes, Rogers, Lipton & Morrell, 2000; Timpane & Hauptman, 2004). If students are not prepared in high school,
the likelihood of them transitioning smoothly into college diminishes. Preparing students for this transition begins both in the classroom and through the guidance programs within the schools.

In conjunction with academic preparedness, the expectations held by the teachers and administrators of the school can influence students' choices to attend college. If the expectations are limited and the students do not feel a college-going culture, there will be less incentive for the students to continue their education. Teachers, guidance counselors, and administrators need to motivate students to complete college applications and financial aid forms.

While guidance counselors are key people in a high school when it comes to college information, many guidance counselors are expected to work with too many students and therefore cannot give students adequate individual attention. Often, schools have a college counselor ratio of 1:500 and a guidance counselor ratio of 1:800 (Olivérez & Tierney, 2005). Students often do not get the college counseling that is necessary for effective transition (Kirst & Venezia, 2004; McDonough, 2004). For this reason, it is necessary for school administration to distribute responsibility for the dissemination of college information to the staff and students. It should not simply be the job of the guidance counselors.

Finances are a predominate concern for students transitioning into college. St. John (2002) estimated that 20% of low-income students did not attend college even though they were academically qualified because they could not afford college tuition. Even when students were academically prepared to attend college, the lack of tuition funds deterred students from choosing to further their educations.
These financial concerns affected parents and students alike. While many working-class parents have an interest in their children going on to college, their children often become overwhelmed by the sacrifices that their parents would have to make in order to attend school. Many students choose to work to gain money for their families as opposed to attending an institution of higher education (Bloom, 2007). Academically and financially, students want to succeed and they understand that college will allow for this success. Ideally, students want to have a career that enables them to leave their current environment and the students understand that college is the most beneficial way to accomplish this career goal (Focus Group 4).

Financial concerns, SES, capital, and high school organization all influence a student's choice to enter college. These complex factors originate in students’ thoughts regarding college in eighth grade if not earlier (Cabrera, Burkum & La Nasa, 2003; Cabrera & La Nasa, 2000; Hossler, Schmitt & Vesper, 1999; McDonough, 1997). It is necessary to understand both what concerns students have regarding college and why they are not transitioning. With this information, urban high schools can help students address these concerns and increase transition rates into college.

Problem Statement
While there is a significant amount of research regarding the elements that influence students’ decisions about going to college, there remains a gap. Much of the literature has not focused on the students’ opinions, viewpoints, or feelings related to the factors that influence a student’s decision to attend college. While quantitative data is necessary, it is also important to take note of the students’ perspective and their reasoning
for their decisions and thus completing a qualitative study. Through talking with the students and analyzing written accounts, additional information can be gained about college decision-making, the information that the students already know, and the information the students desire to know. This data, in conjunction with the experiences of the students, will create a whole picture that will allow for a better understanding of why African American students from low socioeconomic backgrounds do not attend college at the rate.

Purpose

The purpose of this study is to determine the aspirations of African American students at Rosa Parks High School and what resources they have to draw on to realize their aspirations. Additionally, outside factors such as socioeconomic status, college knowledge, social and cultural capital, and financial aid were analyzed as possible influences on student choice.

The driving research question for the study was: What factors influence students’ decisions about whether or not they want to attend college?

Additional Research Questions

1. What are students’ basic understandings of college and what resources are available to them at Rosa Parks High school?
2. What are the career and college aspirations of students at Rosa Parks High School?

3. What do 11th grade students at Rosa Parks High School understand about the college process?

4. What kind of academic experiences have students had that influence their decisions about college?

5. What are the influences on students’ decisions to go to college?

6. What guidance have the students received from counselors or within the curriculum regarding the college process?

7. How do students’ view the expectations of the school and staff and how do these perceptions differ from the actual expectations held by the administration, teachers, and staff?
Students’ Desires to Attend Higher Education

Methodology

The Site

The study was conducted at Rosa Parks High School. This comprehensive high school houses roughly 1,483 students in grades 10 to 12. There is a total enrollment of 1,482 students of which 95% are African American and 5% are Asian, Hispanic, and White (New Jersey Department of Education, 2007). The school is located in an urban neighborhood.

The site was chosen because of race, class, and socioeconomic background. According to the United States Census Bureau (2007a), from 2005-2007, the city had a predominantly African American or Black population. There were 144,237 (54.4%) African American or Black residents, 59,794 (22.5%) White residents, 4,764 (1.8%) Asian residents, and 84,205 (31.7%) Hispanic residents within the city. Of that population there were 182,316 residents who were 21 years old or older. Of that population, 20.5% of the families lived below the poverty line as compared to the United States average of 9.8%. The percentage of individuals who lived below the poverty line was 24.1% compared to the US average of 13.3%.

Educationally, for the same population, had 64.5% of the residents had obtained a high school diploma, compared to the United States average of 84%. Additionally, only 11.8% of the residents possessed a Bachelor’s degree or higher, as compared to the national average of 27% (U.S. Census Bureau, 2007a).

More specifically, according to the school district, in the 2007 school year, 77.6 percent of the student body at Rosa Parks High School graduated. Of those students who
graduated, 21.8 percent of the students were planning to attend a 4-year college and 31.2 percent planned to attend a 2-year institution. The students who planned to work full time comprised of 42.1 percent of the graduating students. Some 3.8 percent of students had desires to enter other post-secondary schools and another 1.1 percent planned on entering the military (New Jersey Department of Education, 2007a).

Participants

The students, administrators, teachers, and staff members were all volunteer participants. Various members of the research team held interviews over a year and a half.

During the college fair held in October 2007, volunteers were requested to partake in a focus group in the spring. The only criteria for the students was that they be in 11th grade and were full-time students at Rosa Parks High School. Eleventh grade students were chosen as the research subjects because it is during this year that students begin to gather specific information about particular colleges (Hossler, Schmit & Vesper, 1999). It is a crucial time for college decision-making. Often the college process leads to uncertainty for many 11th grade students (Hossler, Schmit & Vesper, 1999). Interviewing students during their 11th grade year would help researchers understand students concerns regarding college attendance.

Data Collection

Beginning in their 10th grade year, researchers began to follow the class of 2009 through their experience of high school. During this year, researchers gave writing
prompts to students about their goals and desires about attending college. The prompts were completed in their English courses and 60 prompts were returned.

In the fall of the students' 11th grade, researchers conducted a college fair. This fair allowed students to learn about various colleges and the colleges’ expectations. During this fair, researchers asked for volunteers to be part of a focus group discussion. At the end of the fair students were asked to fill out a survey detailing what the students had learned and what they still had questions about.

During the spring, research held three different focus group sessions. Throughout the three sessions, 44 students were interviewed on a volunteer basis. There were a total of nine focus groups held over a 2-day period.

Throughout the year and a half, researchers interviewed various administrators, guidance counselors, and a teacher in the school. The vice principal was interviewed. The teacher who was interviewed taught senior English and was heavily invested in promoting college attendance in the school. Additionally, the head of the guidance department and all four guidance counselors were interviewed. These interviews enabled the researchers to gain an understanding of the college-going activities and culture at the school from the perspective of adults as well as from that of the students.

Data Analysis

The interviews provided researchers with the opportunity to examine, compare/contrast, and interpret meaningful data. After the interviews were transcribed they were coded and then analyzed for common themes and patterns. Researchers remained cognizant of the outliers and analyzed those for alternate perspectives.
Purpose/Significance

The disparity that exists in education in this country is a concern. With the exorbitant finances spent on education yearly, it is necessary for students of all races, cultures, nationalities, and socio-economic status to be able to attend and to graduate college. Since schools and education in general are mechanisms for creating social equality, it is necessary for high schools and colleges to become aware of the needs of students who are unable to attend college.

This study reveals students’ views and beliefs about college. The outcomes of the research can assist many inner city districts to analyze their own curriculum, organizational structure, expectations, and school setting so that the number of students seeking a college education increases. Additionally, policy can be developed to assist students on both the secondary and higher education levels.

While other studies have reviewed test scores, attendance rates, or policy applications (Adelman, 1999; Cabrera, Burkum & LaNasa, 2003), few studies have asked the students why they do or do not attend college. The difference between this study and other studies is that students’ opinions are of primary importance. The data in this study were collected from the students. As Tierney and Colay (2006) stated, “All too often discussions about the problems of high schools and the challenge of access to college outlook the very individuals about whom there is no much purported concern—the students...if change is going to happen, then a commitment to, and recognition of, individuals must remain at the forefront of educational policy-related research” (p. 2).
Organization of the Dissertation

In chapter I, the current and relevant literature that pertains to both high school preparedness and the transition to college is reviewed. Specifically, the literature related to low-income students and the overarching circumstances that do not allow the students to transition as easily as their middle and upper class peers is examined with attention to theoretical perspectives related to cultural and social capital, academic expectations, community and family influences, and financial access.

The third chapter consists of the methodological aspects of the research. The school and the student body are described. The various methods of data collection are explained and a time frame for each of these modes is referenced.

Concise and informative description of the findings are provided in Chapter IV, which provides the results and findings from the interviews, focus groups, surveys, and writing samples.

Chapter V focuses on the implications of the study. Recommendations for policy and school changes are discussed.
Chapter II

Review of Literature

For many high school students in suburban areas, going to college is expected. These students receive the appropriate information about college programs, take the necessary classes, and maintain the economic resources to attend institutions of higher education. However, for many urban students, college attendance is not feasible due to factors such as socioeconomic status (SES), lack of curriculum preparedness, insufficient mastery of core concepts, and financial concerns. Urban high school students often make the choice to enter or to abstain from higher education because of one or more of these factors.

Researchers (McDonough 1997; Hossler, Schmit & Vesper, 1999; Kahlenberg, 2004; Kirst & Venezia, 2004) have proposed six areas that influence high school students' decisions to attend institutions of higher education: SES status, social and cultural capital, family influences, financial concerns, high school organization, and access to higher education. According to the literature, these factors remain prevalent when students decide whether to continue their formal education.

Various types of literature were used in this research. The articles, books and Internet sources that were gathered were published between 1987 and 2007. The articles and books were predominantly of a qualitative nature. A large portion of the Internet information was quantitative in nature. This information focused more on the statistics of the school, community and state populations. The research was coded in topic areas. The areas were: Socioeconomic status, financial aid and cost, family background, guidance and school.
Methodology Review with Terminology

This study was completed to determine the influences on students in an urban, low-socioeconomic status, predominately minority high school regarding the college process. The intent was to find the factors that influenced the students in attending or not attending college.

In order to gain knowledge about the students and school, the researcher interviewed 8 staff members at the high school. Additionally, focus groups were held where 44 students were interviewed. Over the 2-year period, researchers held a college fair and at that time, students completed surveys. Also, during their 10th grade year, students completed a writing prompt that helped researchers determine if predisposition was a factor for the students.

The following literature review covers six different areas related to college transition. Each element holds key information regarding how it can assist or hinder students’ decisions regarding college.

The term *socioeconomic status* refers to a person’s status in society based on wealth. The variables that determine this status are occupation, education, income, and wealth (Deli-Amen & Turley, 2007). It is necessary to determine how a students’ socioeconomic status influences his/her choices to go to college because it is the education factor that could assist the student in continuing up the SES ladder.

*Social capital* refers to a student’s upbringing. The parents show the student what their expectations are for the student. This consists of educational, financial, and status desires for the child (Hossler, Schmit & Vesper, 1999). Social capital can be learned from
other places, such as schools, but it begins in the home (Hossler, Schmit & Vesper, 1999). While social capital is built in the home, cultural capital refers to the interest of maintaining a particular status and privileges (McDonough, 1997). These elements are often found in middle-class and upper-class families.

During a child’s development, the family structure and expectations are learned. Therefore, students rely on the opinions of their family members. According to Hossler, Schmit and Vesper (1999), parental support was a key factor in influencing students’ aspirations to go onto college.

Many students become increasingly concerned about the transition into college due to financial concerns. Some like Gladieux (2004), stated the gap in attendance at the college level is so wide between lower-class students and middle-class and upper-class students because of lack of college affordability.

High school organization and guidance remains a necessary element for college transition. Students need an academically rich curriculum and guidance support throughout their high school careers (McDonough, 2004).

All of the aforementioned factors focus on individual influences on students decisions regarding college. When they are all combined however, the access to higher education diminishes. There remains a gap between students of lower-socioeconomic, low social and cultural capital students and high-socioeconomic, high social and cultural capital (Gladieux, 2004; McDonough, 1997). Without the appropriate high school structure, family influence, and guidance, students will not gain the necessary knowledge to continue onto college (Hossler, Schmit & Vesper, 1999; McDonough, 1997).
Students' Desires to Attend Higher Education

Socio Economic Status

Higher education can lead to economic prosperity (Carnevale & Rose, 2003; Gladieux & Swail, 1998; Louie, 2007; McDonough, 1997) so it is beneficial for students to gain a college degree. Levin, Belfield, Muennig, and Rouse (2007) found that over a lifetime, males who graduated college earned $950,000–$1,387,000 more than males who dropped out of high school. Similarly, females who graduated college earned $800,000 more over a lifetime than did female high school dropouts.

Significant racial inequality continues to exist in the United States today (Levin, Belfield, Muennig & Rouse, 2007). By understanding how a student’s SES affects students’ transition into college, high schools can alter high school preparedness for such inequalities. Knowledge and attitudes about college often vary based on social class and race (Adelman, 2006; McDonough, 1997). “It is unfortunate to note that despite increased participation of minority students in postsecondary education over the past quarter century, the gap in bachelor’s degree completion between whites and Asians, on the one hand, and the Latinos and African-American on the other, remains wide” (Adelman, 2006 p. 26). Children’s experiences vary based on backgrounds so their transitions into college also differ.

For many students, obtaining degrees from colleges and universities helps ensure economic security, social status, and social mobility (Carnevale & Rose, 2003; Gladieux & Swail, 1998; Louie, 2007; McDonough, 1997). For this reason, it behooves students to continue their education beyond high school. However, a gap exists in college attendance between higher SES and lower SES students. According to Adelman (2006), students'
SES was significantly associated with the transition into college and the completion of degree requirements necessary for students to graduate a four-year institution (xxiii). Higher SES students attended college more frequently than those of lower SES.

Researchers at the U.S. Department of Education (2007) reported that in the fall of 2005, some 17,921,804 students were enrolled at institutions of higher education. Of that number, 61.4% were attending 4-year institutions. Caucasians made up 30.3% of the student body while African-American students made up 5.5% of the undergraduate population. In community colleges, 21.4% of students were Caucasian and 4.9% were African American (National Center for Educational Statistics, 2007). While more students than ever are going to college, the disparity between races exists.

Students often make decisions based on their social class and on the world in which they live. Differences in SES factors are prevalent when students begin discussing college (Kahlenberg, 2004; McDonough, 1997). For example, middle-class students are often surrounded by information and gain knowledge about college from family members who have attended college and friends who may be preparing to attend (Bloom, 2007). Students learn that attending college is an expectation held by family, friends, educators, and society (McDonough, 1997).

Conversely, students from low-income families feel a need to protect themselves from the reality of rejection (Bloom, 2007) and often do not talk as frequently with friends and family about future college endeavors. Students who are not in academic courses in high school or lack college preparation often do not gain the appropriate college information from guidance counselors and thus miss valuable information regarding higher education (Kirst & Venezia, 2004).
Of particular importance are first-generation college-bound students. Typically, students whose parents did not attend college find it more difficult to address the issues related to choice, finances, and application needs when it comes to college (McDonough, 1997). Typically, these students begin thinking about college much later than do students who have parents and family members who have attended higher education institutions (McDonough, 1997). Often, individuals who are first generation college students not only find it difficult to manage the cultural conflicts with attending college, but are also unprepared academically to pursue a degree in higher education (McDonough, 1997).

Students also felt the need to, “shoulder the weight of their own, their family’s, and their community’s hopes and fears about moving out of poverty and into the unfamiliar middle-class orbit; and far too often, they must make this journey alone and unaided” (Bloom, 2007 p. 356).

Gladieux (2004) analyzed the work of Lee and explained that, regardless of level of academic achievement, students of low SES attended college at considerably lower rates than did students of higher SES. Gladieux noted that students from the highest SES quartile and the lowest test-score quartile were more likely to go to college than were students from the lowest SES quartile and the highest test-score quartile. Simply put, “the least bright rich kids have as much chance of going to college as the smartest poor kids” (Gladieux, 2004 p. 24).

Not only does a student’s SES affect the choices made, but high school experience is often a deciding factor. According to Cabrera and La Nasa (2000), the higher a student’s SES, the less susceptible the student was to risk factors such as dropping out, mobility rate, low grade-point average, and single-parent families. On
average, low SES students had at least one risk factor influencing their high school career as opposed to middle and high SES students who had less than one risk factor influencing their high school experience (Cabrera & La Nasa, 2000).

**Social Capital and Cultural Capital**

While roles created by social and cultural capital are different entities, they can actually be intertwined sociologically in educational transition. Coleman (1988) defined social capital as a complex set of relationships that existed within a group of people such as family. McDonough (1997) defined cultural capital as a symbolic role that when turned into economic capital defines groups of people. Both social and cultural capital form students' views about their influence in school and in the world. Therefore, social and cultural capital can influence students' choices to attend college. Bourdieu (1977) as cited by Lareau and Horvat (1999) and Deil-Amen and Turley (2007) determined that students with less cultural and social capital fared worse than did their otherwise-comparable peers.

According to Bloom (2007), students often feared the transition into college because it put their self-esteem and self-worth at risk. They took the chance of being rejected by colleges and being discarded from the world they were trying to enter. They were concerned about battling the hierarchies and rising up the SES ladder. Ogbu (2004) claimed that students often did not transition for fear of "acting White". Black students often rejected the idea obtaining high grades, studying for exams, and completing homework because they deemed these elements of school as typical White behaviors.
Thus, if students completed these tasks, they would be seen as White or as losing their cultural and social identity (p. 29).

Phelan, Davidson and Yu (1998) maintain the Students’ Multiple Worlds Model, which theorize that students attend college or do not transition into college because of borders that are created at a young age. The borders consist of the sociocultural borders, socioeconomic borders, psychosocial borders, linguistic borders, gender borders and heterosexual borders. The sociocultural border focuses on the differences between home and school. If the school emphasizes the literacy, writing, and learning at the school as more important than the home culture, there is a border created.

The socioeconomic border refers to the gap in economic requirements between the school and the home. If the school requires financial backing to participate in an activity and the student cannot afford it, a distinction is made (Phelan, Davidson & Yu, 1998).

Psychosocial border refers to the student and his/her suffering from psychological issues such as depression and anxiety. The student becomes unable to focus in the mainstream school setting and thus loses learning opportunities (Phelan, Davidson & Yu, 1998).

The linguistic border exemplifies many of the schools in urban settings. If a child learns a different language at home, it is often difficult for the student to feel accepted within the society of school. The students have a difficulty adjusting to differences between the languages. Also, if a teacher believes that English is more significant, the child feels devalued (Phelan, Davidson & Yu, 1998).
Gender and heterosexist borders are related to gender and sexual orientation. This is when roles of particular genders or people of particular sexual orientations are promoted throughout the school. This creates barriers for students on various levels (Phelan, Davidson & Yu, 1998).

The structural borders are those within the school that prevent or discourage learning. These borders are created when expectations vary between the staff and students at the school (Phelan, Davidson & Yu, 1998). These border only continue to deter students from the education realm.

Another large factor for students is social capital. Social capital is formed through the time parents invest in their children (Hossler, Schmit & Vesper, 1999). Through the time parents spend raising the children, the amount of support given to the children and the encouragement to further the children’s education, parents greatly influence their children’s social capital both in education and in society (Hossler, Schmit & Vesper, 1999).

According to Hossler, Schmit and Vesper (1999) there were three reasons high school students’ social capital was important in the transition to college. First, students could have used their social capital to enhance their education once they were in academia. Secondly, unlike socioeconomic status, social capital could have been formed outside the home. Therefore, students gained higher social status and were not necessarily limited to the social status of their parents. Lastly, social capital could have enhanced the dynamic within the household of the student. The family supported and adapted behaviors based on each other’s needs. Theoretically, the family could have altered its behaviors to include the task of choosing a college (Hossler, Schmit & Vesper, 1999).
Social capital also can be found among peers and people within the school organization (Hossler, Schmit & Vesper, 1999). Thus, social capital can provide students with resources, support, and networks that will encourage the students' transition into an institution of higher education (Koyama, 2007; Terenzini, Cabrera, & Bernal, 2001).

Cultural capital is the monetary attainment the family has reached within society (McDonough, 1997; Terenzini, Cabrera & Bernal, 2001). Many students in middle and upper classes are taught about cultural capital through their families (McDonough, 1997). Louie (2007) suggested that students in low SES areas were taught a culture of poverty. There was a disconnect between the schools and home life of children. Low-income students not only noticed this difference in their home lives, but were also aware of the inequality that existed in education and access to good education. Students internalized these “analyses, processes of marginalization, identification, and belonging within schools (which) become central to preparation for the transition to college” (Louie, 2007).

Bourdieu (1977) as cited by Lareau (1987) wrote that schools often had poor organization and that teaching styles were for students with high cultural and social capital. For example, school personnel who used particular curricula, linguistic styles and authority patterns assumed that students entering that school had knowledge in those areas and that the students’ social and cultural capitals were equal to those of the staff and administration (Lareau, 1987; Louie, 2007). Ogbu (2004) agreed and stated, “Blacks adopt White-cultural and language frames of reference where they have to in order to succeed in school or in other White controlled institutions that are evaluated by White criteria” (p. 22). Ogbu also stated that often students felt as though they behaved in this
manner of White-cultural behavior, Black students felt they were disloyal to their peers and would be isolated (Obgu, 1990).

Another aspect of social and cultural capital that focuses on Bourdieu’s theory, according to Lareau and Horvat (1999), was *habitus* referring to the internalized expectations, views, tenets, and attitudes of a particular social group (Horvat, 1996; Lareau & Horvat, 1999; McDonough, 1997). The family is the primary provider of *habitus* and children learn this structure through interactions with people in both the family and the community (Horvat, 1996). Habitus is where students often begin contemplating their higher education objectives (McDonough, 1997).

The relationship between social and cultural capital is significant in education, but schools often do not recognize the impact of this capital on the students; consequently, students are constantly trying to find a balance between the disjointedness of school and society.

An example of Bourdieu’s theory that illustrates the relationship between cultural and social capital is playing a card game:

In a card game (the field of interaction), the players (individuals) are all dealt cards (capital). However, each card and each hand have different values. Moreover, the value of each hand shifts according to the explicit rules of the game (the field of interaction) that is being played (as well as the way the game is being enacted). In other words, a good hand of blackjack may be a less valuable hand in gin rummy. In addition, to having a different set of cards (capital), each player relies on a different set of skills (habitus) to play the cards (activate the capital). By folding the hand, a player may not activate his or her capital or may play the
cards (activate the capital) expertly according to the rules of the given game. In another game, the same player may be dealt the same hand, yet because of lack of knowledge of the rules of the game play the hand poorly. Thus, in analyzing social settings, researchers must attend to the capital that each individual in a given field has (Lareau & Horvat, 1999 p 39).

Notice in this example that many people of lower SES simply are not aware of how to “play their cards.” Society has set up a structure that caters to upper and middle class families. Even if high school students of lower status and capital begin the process of college transition, often the structural organization of the process is so skewed towards the other classes that the lower class does not understand where to begin.

The relationship between social and cultural capital is great. All the aspects in each framework influence students’ choices (Terenzini, Cabrera & Bernal, 2001). The decisions high school students make about choice of college, finances for college and academic ambitions can be influenced by the culture of the school, the culture of the community, the students’ family and the personal experiences the students have made in their lives (Horvat, 1996).

*Family Structure and Expectation*

One significant factor in high school students’ choices to transition into college is their families. Students have three main sources of obtaining information: family, friends and school (Hossler, Schmit & Vesper, 1999; Louie, 2007; McDonough, 1997). From the interactions with these three groups, students gain knowledge about expectations held for them regarding higher education.
Koyama (2007) found high school students' choices regarding college was highly affected by the social, cultural and political capital of their family. Students of low SES tended to be raised by parents who were not as involved in school activities (Cabrera, Burkum, & La Nasa, 2003). Additionally, parents of low SES families often did not attend college in the past. According to Carneval and Rose (2004) there was a positive relationship between the parent’s education and that of the student. Hossler, Schmit and Vesper (1999) found that 75% of students whose parents had a college degree attended an institution of higher education.

Terenzini, Cabrera and Bernal (2001), stated that parental encouragement in helping high school students transition to college was important for two reasons. The first was motivational: Parents held high expectations for students and discussed their expectations and desires with their children. The second was proactive. Parents helped students plan and pay for college. Therefore, parents and children needed to discuss college early so that students had time to plan their futures academically and financially.

McDonough (2004) stated that parents played an imperative role in getting their children to think critically about college choices. This encouragement took various forms, such as saving money for college, making college campus visits, and attending financial aid workshops with their children.

Parental encouragement is necessary for students (Cabrera, Burkum, & La Nasa, 2003). Irrespective of a student’s SES, encouragement from family and friends during high school increases a student’s ability to complete the dream of transitioning into college (Cabrera, Burkum & La Nasa, 2003). Hossler, Schmit and Vesper (1999) found a positive relationship between parental encouragement and attendance at an institution of
higher education. Nearly 64% of students who attended a 4-year institution said they received strong encouragement from their parents. Almost 75% of students who reported receiving strong encouragement attended some form of postsecondary education.

The effect of encouragement dissipates as students continue their education (Hossler, Schmit & Vesper, 1999). Early in a student's educational career, parental support has a significant influence; however, by the time students reach their senior year of high school, parental encouragement becomes less significant and by the first year out of high school, parental encouragement has no significance (Hossler, Schmit & Vesper, 1999).

Parents may not become involved in their child's college choice decisions for many reasons. Kirst and Venezia (2004) said that parents of students from low SES did not know what colleges expected from students academically. Parents often became confused about policies of transition as well as course requirements necessary for college entrance.

Olivérez and Tierney (2005) suggested that school personnel needed to plan events to involve parents and families of low-income students. Through financial planning workshops, line-by-line Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) workshops (in multiple languages) and scholarship information sessions, parents gained the opportunity to help their children in their college endeavors.
Financing College

Researchers from The College Board (2006) stated that the price of college has increased since 2005. For students attending 4-year public institutions in 2007 the average cost, including room and board, was $12,796 per year, an increase of 5.6%. For 4-year private institutions, the average cost was more than doubled at $30,367 per year, an increase of 5.7%. In the past 20 years, public higher education tuition has increased $3,538 and private higher education has increased by $6,572. Community college costs are also increasing. The tuition for a 2-year public school in the 2006-2007 was $2,272, an increase of 4.1% from the 2005-2006 school year (The College Board, 2006).

McPherson and Schapiro (1998) acknowledged that the increasing net cost of college caused college enrollment of low SES students to decline. But tuition increases had little impact on college enrollment for more affluent students (McPherson & Schapiro, 1998). Financial aid helps all students, but is crucial for low-income and underrepresented students (Tierney & Venegas, 2004).

Many low SES students were responsible for financing college, while their middle and upper class parents (or sometimes extended family networks) “help out” (McDonough, 1997). McPherson and Schapiro (1998) stated that federal grants encouraged students of low SES to attend college. For high school students of upper-middle-income and middle-income backgrounds, financial support was not necessary for college attendance.

Financial issues are a concern for many families interested in higher education. The amount of saved for college is related to the family’s SES (McPherson & Schapiro,
Students’ Desires to Attend Higher Education

For low- and moderate-income students, affordability is intertwined with a host of other variables rooted in culture, environment, and society expectations (Gladieux, 2004 p. 23). St. John (2002) estimated 20% of low-income students did not attend college even though they were academically qualified because they could not afford college tuition. Even when students were academically prepared to attend college, the inaccessibility of funds deterred students from choosing to further their educations.

Koyoma (2007) stated that retention rates for underrepresented students were often due to financial concerns. Low-income students were less likely to attend college because of this financial constraint. “To increase college access we must move beyond traditional financial approaches that have focused narrowly on issues of college enrollment, without sufficient attention to the multiple factors required to be academically, socially and culturally prepared” (p. 7).

One predictor of financial aid assistance is the amount of family income (Olivérez & Tierney, 2005). Olivérez and Tierney (2005) identified five main forms of financial aid. Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) is a federal and state-funded student aid program that allows students to fill out a form and receive financial aid based on the income of the student and of the family. However, FAFSA forms are often difficult to understand and are geared toward middle and upper class families (Olivérez & Tierney, 2005).

Government and private loans are available to students and are the largest form of finance. Private loans usually supplement the federal and state financial aid (Olivérez & Tierney, 2005). Many students are concerned about obtaining loans because they will
have to repay the money with interest. The idea of going into debt can be a great deterrent to attending college.

A third form of federal and state aid is grants, which are typically given based on financial need and academic success. Grants do not have to be paid back to the state or federal government (Olivérez & Tierney, 2005).

Scholarships are another source of financial aid. Similar to grants, they do not have to be repaid and are given to students by organizations, government, or businesses based on academics, hobbies, talents, or career aspirations. Students often apply for scholarships prior to entering higher education (Olivérez & Tierney, 2005).

Work-study programs help students subsidize college tuition through working in or around the university or college. These positions are only available to those students in the work-study program, so there are guaranteed positions for students who need aid (Olivérez & Tierney, 2005).

While there are financial aid programs, many students are not aware of the opportunities (Olivérez & Tierney, 2005). There continues to be a difference in SES when students learn about higher education. Low SES students and their families often learn about financial aid through school counselors (McDonough, 2004). Higher SES students use not only counselors but also their own experiences and resources (Bailey, 2005; McDonough, 2004).

Many less fortunate families have limited knowledge of financial aid and college prices. This lack of knowledge limits many African-American students and students of low SES (McDonough, 2004; Tierney & Venegas, 2004). Language regarding financial assistance is tailored to middle and upper class families (McDonough, 1997). This lack
of understanding, in conjunction with socio-cultural preparation and inadequate academic preparation, reduces participation in higher education for many low SES students (Tiemey & Venegas, 2004).

Koyoma (2007) stated that retention rates for underrepresented students were often due to financial concerns. Low-income students were less likely to attend college because of this financial constraint. “To increase college access we must move beyond traditional financial approaches that have focused narrowly on issues of college enrollment, without sufficient attention to the multiple factors required to be academically, socially and culturally prepared” (p. 7).

Tiemey and Venegas (2004) reported that one reason why some underrepresented groups were not more prevalent in higher education was a lack of academic and socio-cultural readiness and financial aid information. Programs for increasing student awareness of financial aid were necessary. According to Olivérez and Tierney (2005), there were eight communication channels to reach students: daily announcements, the college counseling office, newsletter, flyers, classroom presentations, community or university presentations, television or periodicals, and websites. If schools did not convey this information effectively, students were left to find and analyze the information on their own which often led to students being overwhelmed (Olivérez & Tierney, 2005).

High School Organization

The organizational structure the school provides is paramount to college transition. High schools structure the students’ understanding of the world. Counseling availability and the college culture created within the school affects the way students’ futures will develop (Horvat, 1996). School student bodies, by nature, reflect residential
patterns that segregate students based on SES (Carnevale & Rose, 2004). “Students with higher SES tend to go to high schools that are more successful in providing access to college, especially highly selective colleges” (Carnevale & Rose, 2004, p.130).

McDonough (2004) cited four major features that influenced college transitions for high school students: a college preparatory curriculum that challenged them; a college culture that included high academic standards and formal and informal communication related to college choice and transition; a staff devoted to college transition and higher education; a staff available for advising and counseling students who were attending college (p. 9).

**Curriculum**

Students often do not transition into college because they are not academically prepared. Many student of lower SES are not receiving the same rigorous training as their middle or upper- class peers (Carnevale & Rose, 2004; Deli-Amen & Turley, 2007; McDonough, 2004; Oakes, Rogers, Lipton & Morrell, 2000; Timpane & Hauptman, 2004).

According to Kirst and Venezia (2004), low-income students were less likely to be enrolled in college preparatory classes. In this study, 28.3% of the low-income students were enrolled in college preparatory classes, compared to 48.8% of middle class students, and 65.1% of high-income students. African American students accounted for 25.7% of the enrolled population and Latinos made up 22.6% of the population.

This curriculum inequality leads to problems when students try to transition to college. Students who take more robust courses such as AP/honors classes, or who attend
magnet/academy programs and smaller learning communities have an advantage over their peers (Olivérez & Tierney, 2005). These are also the students who are targeted by colleges and counselors for advisement (Olivérez & Tierney, 2005).

In a study prepared by The College Board in 2003-2004, one-third of first and second-year college students required remedial courses (The College Board, 2006). Adelman (2006) noted that math courses and grades were key determinates of whether students would complete a bachelor’s degree (Adelman, 2006). Moreover, Adelman (2006) found that students from the lowest SES often attended schools that did not offer math beyond Algebra 2 (Adelman, 2006). Therefore, when low-income students entered college, they already were behind their upper-income peers.

Adelman (1999) found that the intensity and quality of a high school curriculum were a predictors of whether high school students would choose to transition into college and complete a degree. In fact, the curriculum represented 41% of the academic resources students took to college. Test scores and class rank/academics were 30% and 29% respectively (Adelman, 1999).

Adelman’s study is important because by determining what inhibits transition; schools can determine how to enhance students’ choices and abilities when they transition into college. As Adelman (2006) said with regard to curriculum:

This is not a case of ‘little-to-modest’ effort or a small population. It is a megawork in progress, much of which depends on students’ reading skills on entering high school. If a student cannot read close to grade level, the biology textbook, the math problems, the history documents, the novel—all will be
beyond them. And if high schools are not offering a full academic curriculum, there is little hope. (p. 27)

Academic tracking remains common in schools. While Judge Wright of the Supreme Court declared tracking illegal (*Hobson v. Hansen*, 1967), it is a practice that continues in many U.S. high schools. Students who are not in college tracks often are not provided with information about college. African American, Latino, and first-generation college students are significantly more likely than their Caucasian peers to be in non-college courses (McDonough, 2004; Plank & Jordan, 2001).

Finn (2006) referenced academic success and behavioral engagement as two necessary components in the classroom. This study analyzed data from the National Education Longitudinal Study of 1988. In total, 24,599 at-risk students were analyzed. Finn determined that if the student faired better and transitioned more frequently if the student did well academically and remained engaged in classroom activity.

*College Guidance*

College counseling is necessary for students when preparing for college. "We know that counselors influence students’ aspirations, plans, enrollments, and financial aid knowledge. Meeting frequently with a counselor increases a student’s chance of enrolling in a four-year college, and if students, parents, and counselors work together and communicate clearly, students’ chances of enrolling in college significantly increase" (McDonough, 2004 p.9).

However, there are fewer counselors per student in many lower SES districts (Kirst & Venezia, 2004). Opportunities for college counseling can be restricted in urban
high schools that represent underprivileged students. For example, some urban high schools have a college counselor ratio of 1:500 and a guidance counselor ratio of 1:800 (Olivérez & Tierney, 2005). Often counselors need to focus on college transition in conjunction with other issues such as disciplinary concerns, mental health concerns, course schedules, and parent concerns (Kirst & Venezia, 2004). Since counselors are unable to spend a significant amount of time with students, many students do not receive information they need to transition into college (Kirst & Venezia, 2004; McDonough, 2004).

For students of low-socioeconomic status, it is imperative that the guidance department at the school provide the students with the necessary information. “Sometimes the overall climate of expectations of the school will make up for the gap in individual families’ knowledge... Individuals who lack college choice cultural capital are dependent upon the sponsorship of the guidance counselor to help them receive insider information and marshal the organizational resources that back their college aspirations” (McDonough, 1997 p. 100-101). Lower SES schools need to acknowledge this fact and higher more guidance personnel for students.

The college transition process is a long and involved one. McDonough (2004) stated that the transition begins during the middle school years. Students begin to develop college awareness and ideas of academic aspirations. The students began taking courses that prepared them for the college transition process. During 10th and 11th grades, students began looking for schools that meet their needs socially and academically (McDonough 2004).
Access to Higher Education

Access to higher education focuses on the ability for high school students to enter college. This access encompasses multiple areas and is primarily found in SES, cultural or social capital, family resources, financial assets and high school organization. These complex factors originate in students’ thoughts regarding college in eighth grade, if not earlier (Cabrera, Burkum & La Nasa, 2003; Cabrera & La Nasa, 2000; Hossler, Schmitt & Vesper, 1999; McDonough, 1997).

Enrollment in higher education greatly reflects the accessibility of higher education as well as the perceptions of students and the value they place on attending college as opposed to other pursuits (Thomas, 1998).

Access to higher education remains unequal. “In a society where people start out unequal, educational attainment measured by test scores and grades can become a dodge—a way of laundering the found money that comes with being born into the right bank account or the right race. And class and race can confound the relationship between educational merit and opportunity” (Carnevale, 2005, p.26). For children of working class families, the families’ income supersedes a student’s innate ability. However, for students of the middle and upper class families, the students’ innate abilities surpass the income of the family (Carnevale, 2005).

Secondary schools, especially those in urban and rural areas, play a key role in students’ transition into college. “High schools and colleges themselves, as institutional contexts, are crucial to access in that they respectively influence the decision-making process of both students, as they think about where to apply and where to go, and the admissions committees, who grant entry” (Louie, 2007).
McDonough (2004) suggested six ways to improve college access for high school students: Financial knowledge, academic preparedness, more student counseling, communication enhancement throughout the school, community involvement and more equitable higher education policies. By limiting financial constraints for students, access becomes more practical. In ensuring stronger academic preparedness, schools maintained that high school students were ready to go into higher education. By creating a P-16 curriculum, school staff will make the academic transition into college easier. More guidance strengthens access for and helps the counselors to work with students about college aspirations, career goals and general college preparedness. Counselors and schools needed to disseminate information in a more vigorous and communicative way so that students obtain knowledge about college opportunities. Community involvement in the academic and cognitive development of dreams and goals for college increased enrollment for at-risk students. Lastly, institutions of higher education needed to make their admissions policies more equitable for all students.

Summary

The various researchers provided the many factors to college transition. Access to college was dependent on influences by a student’s SES background, social and cultural status, financial status, family structure and high school experience.

Through this research and literature review I have constructed a theoretical framework that encompasses the empirical and theoretical research of other authors. Primary factors of whether high school students’ transition from high school into college
are high school structure, socioeconomic status, family and social habitus and financial aid.

The school organization plays an integral part in students’ transition into college. The more frequently students see their guidance counselors and have meetings about college preparations, the more aware they will become about the college process. Additionally, students must be prepared academically to attend college. The school staff must prepare students not only to be good citizens, but also to be academically ready to enter an institution of higher education.

The second element, SES, continues to be a major factor in college transition. The SES students have often determines their access to quality education and the opportunities they are provided for secondary and postsecondary education. Decisions about college and future endeavors are often influenced by the students’ SES.

Family structure is another primary element of college transition and affects what is expected of the student. If the family has high expectations for the student, it is likely the student will consider higher education. If the student is not given this outlet to express dreams about postsecondary education at home, the knowledge of continuing education is not fully developed by the time it is necessary to apply to college.

Finances are also is often a concern. If students do not have funding to attend college, the dream of higher education is quickly extinguished. While the government provides some financial aid, it is not enough incentive for many students to take advantage.

Social capital and cultural capital the students possess influences the college expectations of students. These beliefs are based on the society in which students are
Students' Desires to Attend Higher Education

raised and are deeply rooted within each child. While students may be academically prepared, if they do not maintain a certain social or cultural capital, the transition into college will be difficult. A student's family structure affects what is expected of the student. If the family has high expectations for the student, it is likely the student will consider higher education. Children need to begin thinking about college at a very young age. If the student is not given this outlet to express dreams about postsecondary education at home, the college knowledge is not fully developed by the time it is necessary to apply to college.

The school plays an integral part in students' transition into college. The more frequently a student sees his/her guidance counselor and has meetings about college preparations, the more aware the student will become about the college transition process. Additionally, students must be prepared academically to attend college. The school must prepare students not only to be good citizens, but also to be academically ready to enter a career or an institution of higher education.

Having college plans at least by the 10th grade, attending a college-focused high school, having parents who expect them to go to college, and having assistance in negotiating an adequate financial aid package are the key determinants to college attendance and choice (McDonough, 1997). These aspects work together to determine the accessibility of college for students.

One major gap in research on transition from high school to college is the students' points of view. Few authors have asked students why they chose to attend college. I will use students as primary sources of information. While other qualitative
factors are helpful to determine why high school students make their choices, students should be an integral part of research.

Another aspect absent from current literature is the acknowledgement that students often do not transition into college primarily because of social and organizational structures. For example, if students do not make the transition into college because they are of a low SES, the lack of knowledge and experience that students' have leads to lack of transition. Simply stated, the structure society has established is not equal for all. If students make the choice not to transition into college, it is likely that they do not have the financial or academic resources to attend a university and often must assist the family by entering the workforce after high school. This is not a choice students necessarily make for themselves. It simply is a necessity for the family. Consequently, the structure currently in place in this society limits choice.

The research reviewed has focused on test scores, graduation rates, interviews with teaching staff, and social demographics. But very few researchers spoke with the people who are most involved with college transition, the students. This study will focus on the perspectives of students in urban education, who have many of these same organizational barriers to contend with on a daily basis. As Tierney and Colay (2006) stated, “All too often discussions about the problems of high schools and the challenge of access to college outlook the very individuals about whom there is no much purported concern—the students...if change is going to happen, then a commitment to, and recognition of, individuals must remain at the forefront of educational policy-related research” (p. 2). This study may provide a way for students to have a voice about transitioning from high school into higher education. In addition, participants in this
study may be assisted in achieving their college aspirations through being part of this study.
CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this study was to explore the process that students undertake at Rosa Parks High School when deciding upon whether or not to enter higher education. Many factors influence students’ decision to attend college. Some of these factors include: financial concerns, social and cultural capital, school expectations and college knowledge. By understanding the aspects that influenced students’ decisions to attend college, urban districts can enhance their programs to ensure that a significant amount of students follow through with the application process and attend college. In addition, through incorporating student voices in this study, hopefully, other students may be inspired to overcome barriers and decide to attend college.

Design and Methods

This study is a descriptive study, using interpretive, qualitative methods. The intent of the study is not to alter the school, but instead to examine what happened within the school regarding college-going behaviors. Through the use of various qualitative methods such as focus groups, interviews, and surveys, the researcher was able to gain information about the students and staff members at Rosa Parks High School. The purpose was to study how the students and staff at Rosa Parks High School understood the process of going to college and the influences that hamper students’ continuation onto college. By determining how the students interpret their high school experiences and adult communication, the researchers could identify the gaps where students need more education and assistance from the staff and community.
Over the past 2 years, the researcher interviewed staff and students at Rosa Parks High School to gain a better understanding of the elements that shaped students' opinions about college. Through focus groups, individual interviews, writing prompts, and college surveys, the researcher was able to assess the college going culture of the school and what specific aspects influenced students' decisions regarding going to college.

The research team consisted of one faculty member and six graduate students. All members of the research team conducted the interviews. I conducted three of the interviews with staff members. The other research team members conducted the remainder of the interviews. The faculty member, one graduate student, I were present at both focus group sessions. The faculty member and I conducted six of the eight focus groups. One other member of the team conducted the other two interviews. Each focus group used interview questions developed by the faculty member and myself. The team members were to follow the questions directly.

Participants

The participants consisted of 44 students and 10 staff members. The students were all African American and were in the 11th grade of Rosa Parks High School (roughly 17 years-old). The staff members ranged in age from 35-55 years of age and were African American and Hispanic. There were a total of 8 staff members interviewed at the school. Specifically, 2 administrators, 4 guidance counselors, the director of the guidance department, and the health services coordinator were interviewed over the 2-year period. Interviewing the staff members enabled the researcher to gather information from various people who assisted students in making college choices. By gaining different opinions
and viewpoints, the researcher not only determined the students’ experience, but also became aware of gaps within the college process at the school.

The students who participated in the study were recruited from the school’s college fair in the fall of 2007. The fair consisted of a wide range of colleges such as Rutgers University, Wilberforce College, Seton Hall University, Essex County Community College, Berkeley College, Wilkes University, and Bloomfield College. This allowed students to become familiar with 4-year schools and 2-year schools. Moreover, students had the chance to see how many opportunities and options there were available to them. All of the students were invited and expected to attend the fair, but many of the teachers did not bring their students down during the allotted time.

Among the tables for each college representative, there was a table where students could volunteer for what was described as a “focus group discussion with Seton Hall University researchers.” The only stipulation was that the students had to be in 11th grade. It was during this event that I was first able to speak directly with some of the students. Many of the students approached the table and immediately said, “Can you give me money to go here?” It was evident at this moment what the students primary concerns were.

By the end of the college fair, there were 112 volunteers who had signed up for the focus groups. While many of the students were interested in the focus groups, many of them were just looking for guidance and hoping that we could assist them in the college process.

One factor necessary to address about the participants is that, on the day of the fair, while researchers were asking for volunteers, there were students who did not attend
the fair. On that day, there were 200 students sick and did not attend school. Additionally, only students who had high school ID’s were permitted to attend the fair. This could have limited the pool of potential subjects for this study.

The information that was collected was put into a database and the researcher began contacting students via the telephone and through the school. Letters were sent to individual students in homeroom about an upcoming focus group and the students were asked to have their parents/guardians sign the permission form and the students were to return the completed information to their homeroom teachers. On the first attempt, only 12 participants returned the form. The second attempt seemed more fruitful with twenty-seven participants.

There were a total of 33 females and 11 males in both focus group interviews (see Table 1). All of the students were African-American. None of the students were White or Hispanic.

Table 1
Number of Participants in focus Groups

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date of Group</th>
<th>Girls</th>
<th>Boys</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>March Focus group 1</td>
<td>5 girls</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>March Focus Group 2</td>
<td>2 girls</td>
<td>3 boys</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>May Focus Group 3</td>
<td>3 girls</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>May Focus Group 4</td>
<td>2 girls</td>
<td>1 boy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>May Focus Group 5</td>
<td>2 girls</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>May Focus Group 6</td>
<td>8 girls</td>
<td>1 boy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>May Focus Group 7</td>
<td>5 girls</td>
<td>4 boys</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>May Focus Group 8</td>
<td>7 girls</td>
<td>1 boy</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
There were three categories of data that the researcher was trying to obtain. First, it was imperative to understand how students viewed college. The researcher wanted to know what concerns and tenets students had related to college and the transition into college or the workforce. Through the writing prompts and the college fair questionnaire, the researcher gained more knowledge about the opinions that students had.

While it was necessary to determine the students’ opinions about college itself, it was also of paramount importance for the researcher to understand the students’ aspirations and their desires beyond high school. On both an educational and a career level, researchers wanted to understand students’ desires and their goals for the future. Through focus groups, the researcher gained more knowledge about students’ future desires and aspirations. This was the key element of the study. It allowed the researcher to hear the specific concerns, thoughts, and beliefs the students held. The information went beyond school statistics, grade point averages, and SAT scores. It was information from the students about how they felt and their experiences that influenced these feelings.

Part of understanding the students’ future is to also understand their past. The school was an integral part of the students’ educational experience and it influenced their decision-making for the future. By interviewing administrators, guidance counselors, and a teacher, the researcher was able to understand what was occurring in the students’ day-to-day lives that might influence their decisions and knowledge related to college.

Site

Rosa Parks High School was a comprehensive high school that housed grades 10 through 12. The administration consisted of a principal, 3 vice principals, and 7
department heads. There were roughly 80 teachers and 4 guidance counselors. During the years of research at the high school, it was evident that there was a retention problem. Both school years began with a number of vacancies for teaching positions. During the school year, there was usually a lack of guidance counselors and teachers. For example, the first year the researcher worked in the school there were only two guidance counselors in the school. Two more were hired by the beginning of November. This not only disrupted the students, but also the courses that the students attended.

The student body consisted of a total enrollment of 1482 students. Of these students, 97.6% were African American and 2.4% were Asian and Hispanic, and White (NJ Department of Education, 2007). These demographics were not consistent with the demographics of the city: 53.1% of the city’s residents were African American or Black residents, 21.6% were White, and 31.7% were Hispanic (US Census Bureau, 2007a).

This total enrollment often changed. In the recent State Report Card, in the 2006-2007 school year, the high school enrolled 289 9th graders, 343 10th graders, 352 11th graders, and 383 12th graders. However, the student mobility rate was 34.5%. In comparison the state average for mobility rate was 10.1% (State of NJ Department of Education, 2006). This high mobility rate meant that the makeup of the student-body changed consistently.

In addition to the relatively high mobility of its residents, the city’s neighborhoods generally housed lower socioeconomic families. The site was chosen because of race, class, and socioeconomic background. As of 2006, 19.6% of the families lived below the poverty line compared to the United States average of 9.8%. The
percentage of individuals who lived below the poverty line was 24.4% compared to the U.S. average of 13.3%.

The Supreme Court (Abbott v. Burke, 1985) deemed this school as in need of additional funding. Due to the low tax base in the city, the school provided additional monies to the districts that had large amounts of low-socioeconomic families. The Supreme Court specified 31 districts in need of additional financial resources. The law was not simply based on financial disparities. It was enacted for equality in education. However, 10 years later, the graduation rate still varied between the urban and suburban schools. In this city, as of 2005, the dropout rate was 4.32%. However, upon closer review, there were 7,080 students enrolled (age 16) and only 2,082 students graduated (State of NJ Department of Education, 2006).

Both the city and the high school rates of education attainment were lower than state and national averages. For example, the percent of the population in the city who obtained high school degrees was 65.5% compared to the United States average of 84.1%. Additionally, only 11.9% of the residents possessed a Bachelor's degree or higher as compared to the national average of 27% (U.S. Census Bureau, 2006). Many of the students planned on attending college upon completion of high school (see Table 2).

Table 2
Student College Choices in Past Years

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Graduating Class</th>
<th>2005</th>
<th>2006</th>
<th>2007</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Total Students who graduated</td>
<td>85.2%</td>
<td>84.2%</td>
<td>77.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students Planning on attending 4-year colleges</td>
<td>22.6%</td>
<td>20.4%</td>
<td>21.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students planning on attending 2-year colleges</td>
<td>41.7%</td>
<td>41.7%</td>
<td>31.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students planning on full time employment</td>
<td>20.4%</td>
<td>20.4%</td>
<td>42.1%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
It was obvious that the school reflected the population of the city in which it is located. While it may have been a source of advancement for some, the same obstacles exist both in the school and in the community surrounding it.

While the students had trouble graduating and continuing on to higher education, the school ran similar to any other secondary school. The classrooms were traditional with individual desks in rows for the students. Most of the rooms still had blackboards and there were approximately 30 students per class. The ratio of students to computer (or vice-versa) was 4.2:1. This was higher than the state average of 3.1:1 (State of NJ Department of Education, 2006).

Rosa Parks High School struggled with the test scores required by No Child Left Behind State of NJ Department of Education, 2006). In 2007, only 12.4% of the students passed the state test necessary for graduate (compared to the state average of 89.3%). The other 74.4% of students were required to go through an alternative assessment that deemed them prepared to graduate high school (Compared to the state average of 11.2%).

Data

The interviews were conducted at Rosa Parks High School and at respective universities. The researcher interviewed these individuals over a 2-year period from the October of 2006 to May of 2008. Interviews, focus groups, writing samples, and questionnaires were all used to gather information.

During the interviews and upon completion of the focus groups and interviews field notes were taken for future reference and to reflect on the process of the interviews.
Even though all of the interviews were audio taped, it was necessary to document the experiences prior and after the interviews were completed.

The interviews focused on elements that have been identified in prior research as major aspects that contribute to why students do not attend college. The questions were based off of these overarching themes (see Appendix A&B for full list of questions).

*Socioeconomic status.* There remains a discrepancy between students attending college from various social status settings. Students who are of lower socioeconomic status are less likely to attend college than their suburban counterparts. According to a study from 2004 completed by the National Center for Educational Statistics, 49.6% of low-income students who graduated from high school in 2007 attended college the subsequent fall. This rate compares with 63.5% of middle class students and 79.3% of high-income students.

*Academic preparedness.* Students from urban areas are not as prepared academically as other students. For this reasons, students often do not attend college for fear of failure on the college level.

*College Knowledge.* Many students from more urban settings are unaware of the college process and how to gain entrance into a college or university. Many suburban
students are not first-generation college students and therefore get guidance from parents/guardians. However, these students do not have the same college experience within their families and are intimidated by the process.

*Expectation of the teachers and administration.* Many of the students are influenced by the expectations that their teachers and administrators hold for them. However, if these expectations are not present, the students can be just as equally affected. There must be a college-going culture within the school to influence the students.

The focus group interview questions primarily focused on what students experienced at Rosa Parks High School (curriculum, guidance, teachers, expectations), college and career plans of the students, predisposition of college goals, and family and community influences. The questions allowed researchers to gain information about how the students’ felt about their current educational experience and what plans they had for the future.

During the interviews and the focus groups, the researcher was instructed to audiotape the interviews and to cover the questions listed. Upon completion of the interview, the researcher transcribed the material.

*Writing Prompts*

During the spring semester of their 10th grade years (2007), the researcher conducted a writing assessment with the students from different English courses. An
email was sent to three English teachers who taught sophomore English courses. There were two teachers who respond to the request. However, after the prompts were delivered to the teachers, there were 60 completed writing prompts returned. Since students were in semesterized courses, half of the 10th grade class did not actually take English during the spring semester. Hence, only half of the 10th grade student-body was taking English and had access to the prompts.

The prompts asked students “What are your career and/or college goals and aspirations? What steps do you need to complete to get to those goals and aspirations? Explain in detail” (see Appendix D).

The purpose of this journal was to gauge students’ college knowledge at the high school during their 10th grade year. The question was worded in such a way that would allow students to answer in a multitude of ways. It did not assume that students would be attending college.

According to McDonough (1997), students’ are in a predisposition phase by the time they are in 10th grade. The journal allowed researchers to determine if a large number of the students actually experienced this phase of the college going behavior or if they lacked the desire and motivation to attend college.

Additionally, the prompt allowed researchers to gauge whether or not students understood the necessary steps related to their goals. While many students had the predisposition to attend college, the steps needed to obtain those goals may or may not have been evident. Therefore, the prompt allowed researchers to not only determine predisposition, but also to judge whether students understood the expectations held by the high school and the colleges.
College Fair Questionnaires

During the college fair, 11th grade students were requested to complete a questionnaire that asked them questions regarding college attendance, career choices, and helpfulness of the college fair.

The questionnaire itself consisted of check boxes and spaces for written responses. On the form there were seven questions asked. The first question focused on what the student would be interested in pursuing a career in as of that day. The second question was about whether or not the student planned on attending college and why (not). The third question was a continuation of the second question and asked what the students planned to do after high school. There were six options: attend college full-time, attend college part-time, take a break from school, join the military, start a career that does not require college or other. The fourth question was about what the student learned from the college fair. The fifth question was a list of four true/false questions and about what the students wanted to have more information about. The options were college admissions, cost of college, how to pay for college and career option. The sixth question was a fill in question regarding what the student wanted more information about. Lastly, there was a space for additional comments (see Appendix E).

There were 145 responses returned. There were 77 females and 64 males who responded. The other 4 students did not specify gender. There were 6 students who reported that they would not be attending college. There were 138 students who identified college as a plan for the future.

Students seemed to feel more educated at the end of the college fair. Overall the outcome of the college fair was a success. Since the school had not had a college fair in
the school's history, for the first one, it was a success. Students identified that they learned a lot throughout their time at the fair (see Table 3).

Table 3
*Student Responses from the College Fair*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Students learned About</th>
<th>College Admissions</th>
<th>College Cost</th>
<th>Financing College</th>
<th>Career Options</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>130</td>
<td>113</td>
<td>106</td>
<td>133</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Did Not Respond</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The purpose of the questionnaire was simply to understand what the students knew about college prior to entering the college fair and what they learned. Additionally, it allowed researchers to see what students still needed information about and what they were interested in doing as a career in the future.

Regarding the students who did not respond to the questionnaire, there could have been multiple reasons for their lack of participation. First of all, students were attending the fair during class time. It is possible that students were being rushed back to class and did not have time to complete the form. Another possibility is that the students may have been so focused on speaking with the admissions counselors at the fair, the students simply ran out of time to fill out the questionnaire at the end of their allotted time.
Interviews

Interviews with Administration and Faculty

The researcher began the study by spending time within Rosa Parks High School. The researcher interviewed teachers, administrators and faculty to gain their perspective on how the school is run and the expectations they hold of their students. Through interviews with the vice principal, principal, and a teacher, the researcher was able to gain access into the schedules, routines, and habits of the staff and students.

Administration

The vice principal was interviewed during the fall semester of 2006. He provided responses to questions about scheduling and the daily routine. This also assisted the researcher in gaining knowledge about the expectations that the administration held for both the faculty and for the students at the high school level.

The researcher also interviewed the ninth grade academy principal. The ninth grade is in a different facility. The staff and administration varied between the two schools. By understanding the transition of the students from the ninth grade academy into the typical high school, researchers were able to understand where the students had come from prior to entering The Rosa Parks High School. Additionally, it was necessary to understand the expectations of the administration and how they varied from the high school administration.
School To Work Coordinator

The school to work coordinator was interviewed in order to understand the programs available for all students at the high school. The idea behind this program was to immerse students into the business world. The coordinator networked with large companies and universities to expose the students to business opportunities.

Upon meeting the coordinator, she was a well-dressed and poised woman. She was very proud of the program and interested in sharing her experiences with the children and the corporations. She explained that the program worked with universities in the areas and corporations such as Prudential.

Many of the programs offered by the school-to-work program consisted of a relatively small proportion of the students. According to the coordinator, 10 students per year were admitted to the program. These students received a tremendous experience and had the opportunity to travel and expand their knowledge beyond the city streets.

School Assistance Coordinator

Another staff member interviewed was the school assistance coordinator. Researchers interviewed this person on multiple occasions to understand the realities that the students faced on a daily basis. The counselor was able to provide the researcher with specific information regarding students' home-life, academic preparedness, cultural backgrounds, and environmental risk factors.

The school assistance coordinator has daily interaction with students. During the interviews, she was interrupted many times by students seeking her assistance and
support. It was apparent that she was an integral part of the school and the students and faculty had great respect for her.

The coordinator talked very frankly about the school, the community, and her students. She was very aware of the cultural and social capital with which each student came into school. Additionally, she was aware of the obstacles the students face both in school and in the community.

Guidance Counselors

The researcher throughout the 2-year period interviewed the 4 guidance counselors. Each counselor had his/her own way of counseling students. For this reason, it was necessary to determine each counselor's philosophy. These philosophies included how often counselors saw their students, how many of their students were academically prepared for college, and what would enhance their ability to be effective counselors.

There were 2 male counselors and 2 females counselors. Additionally, there was a guidance department head who was responsible for coordinating the counseling center and in addition, she saw students.

The guidance department was extremely small. There was a partition between the visitors and the counselors, where the visitors were permitted to enter in order to talk to the counselors. Each office could only hold two people comfortably. Between the papers, books, and furniture, it was difficult to move around the office. The walls of the office were thin and therefore other conversations were audible even when the office door was closed.
The purpose of interviewing the guidance department was to see what information the students were being given regarding college and the steps needed to get into college. Additionally, it was necessary to understand the expectations held by the school and the guidance department regarding college-going behaviors.

Teacher

It was necessary to interview a teacher at this high school. Being that the teacher worked with the administration and the students consistently, it was important to see how this teacher felt about the overall ability for students to transition into college.

One teacher from the school was interviewed. The teacher was an English teacher who primarily worked with seniors. During the interview she explained that she had worked with all grade level students and was comfortable with her current teaching assignment. Her input was necessary to determine both the academic curriculum and the college knowledge that students gained throughout their time at the high school.

Focus Groups

During each session of interviews, the researcher provided food and beverages (bagels, juice and donuts). This helped relax the students and gave them an informal venue to converse with other students. Once the students had an opportunity to have some food, the researchers evenly divided the students randomly. The students and one researcher sat around the wooden tables that were in the media center and the formal interview began.
The questions were constructed carefully. Each interviewer started by asking the students about either their life at Rosa Parks High School or about their goals after high school. The questions focused on the students' daily life at the school, their plans after high school, the family and community involvement in their lives, and the school's role in their lives both on an academic level and a guidance level.

The first focus group session was held on March 18, 2008. Of the 12 participants, there were 10 who attended the session. On that particular morning, I drove into the school parking lot and spotted two police cars and an ambulance. As the researcher gathered in the parking lot, there was a possible "problem" that could be occurring in the school. As the researcher entered however, the security guards seemed to be comfortable and willing to let the researcher enter the building. The researcher went straight to the media center where we had planned to have our focus groups.

While I was in the media center setting up bagels, juice and coffee for the students, one of the vice principals came over the loudspeaker and announced "this is a code green." The media specialist went to the front door, the children who were at the front desk moved to the tables around the corner from the door. The media specialist came over and informed us that the students were in lockdown. No student was aloud to leave the classrooms. Everyone seemed very calm and there was no noise coming from the hallway. Everyone sat quietly and waited for further instruction (3/18/08 ST field notes, p. 2).

A few minutes passed when the media specialist informed us that a student had punched a teacher and left the classroom. The security guards were on the lookout for that student. After the lockdown ended, one of the vice principals came in and informed
us that apparently someone had escaped the local mental hospital and had gotten into the building with a pik-ax and a bag of marijuana. He reiterated, “the safety of our students is of primarily importance” (3/18/08 ST field notes, p. 2-3).

Once the lockdown was over, the students filed into the media center. The first three to enter the room were Akil, Jeffrey and Natasha. After we insisted, they took some food and had a seat at a nearby table.

I tried to talk to Akil, Jeffrey and Natasha about the lockdown. Akil informed me that he had to sit under a table in the back of the chemistry room. When I asked him how often this happened he said once every 2 or 3 months. He seemed not to be concerned and did not seem to be interested in what was happening that caused the lockdown (3/18/08 ST field notes, p. 2-3).

The students were split into two groups (see Table 4-6). Each group contained 5 students and two researchers. The interviews lasted approximately 1 hour.

Table 4
*Students in Focus Group 1 and 2*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>March 2008</th>
<th>Focus Group 1</th>
<th>Focus Group 2</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Courtney</td>
<td>Natasha</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Akil</td>
<td>Ayesha</td>
<td>Natasha</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ayesha</td>
<td>Natasha</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Natasha</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 5
*Students in Focus Groups 3, 4, and 5*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>May 2008 First Session</th>
<th>Focus Group 3</th>
<th>Focus Group 4</th>
<th>Focus Group 5</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ebony</td>
<td>Sharae</td>
<td>LeGia</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chanel</td>
<td>Chrystal</td>
<td>Diane</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Victor</td>
<td>Kiara</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 6
Students in Focus Groups 6, 7, and 8

May 2008 Second Session

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Focus Group 6</th>
<th>Focus Group 7</th>
<th>Focus Group 8</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mecca</td>
<td>Don’ mesha</td>
<td>Whitney</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ebony</td>
<td>Jonisha</td>
<td>Stephanie</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shawnanta</td>
<td>Amber</td>
<td>Tiara</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Issac</td>
<td>Myriam</td>
<td>Alicia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Christopher</td>
<td>Lamar</td>
<td>Abideen</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Amanda</td>
<td>Kiara</td>
<td>Chrystal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wayne</td>
<td>Kimberly</td>
<td>Teneva</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kenneth</td>
<td>Alashah</td>
<td>Alberta</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anita</td>
<td>Alicia</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The second focus session was completed in two different sessions. The first session consisted of 10 students. The students were divided up into 3 students per group. The second group was larger consisting of 34 students. In this section, students were put into groups of roughly 9 students.

Luckily, there were no altercations occurring at the school during this set of interviews. As I entered the school, there was specific instructions to go directly to the media center. As I entered the media center, I was told that today would not be a good day for me to work there. Instead, the media specialist suggested we try using a classroom. Apparently, the vice principal had not informed the media specialist of my arrival. After a five-minute conversation with the vice principal, I was informed the interview could continue in the media center (05/07/08 ST field notes, p. 1).

During the first set of interviews, students were willing to discuss their thoughts about college. The first group of interviews seemed to start off much slower than the second group. There were 2 girls and 1 boy in the group. Students seemed hesitant of
their responses and were careful as to what they said. Over time, however, the students became more comfortable with the researchers and seemed more responsive to the questions.

During the second set of focus groups on that day, the groups were significantly larger. The second group was also much rowdier. They were outspoken and often had side conversations. Personally, I found it difficult to be an observer and not a teacher at this point. Usually, I would redirect the students however, in this situation, I had to just listen and try to redirect when the students digressed (05/07/08 ST field notes, p. 4). There were 4 boys and 5 girls involved in this group. The girls often spoke up and were eager to share their opinions.

The experience allowed me to have a true understanding of the students’ views on college and on their educational process up to this point. While the students did have the predisposition of wanting to attend college, it was clear that they were still unaware of the steps necessary to get there. The students were very honest with their responses and were eager to gain more knowledge about college and the process they needed to take in order to get there.

Data Analysis

Coding

There were two different aspects of the coding process. The first consisted of differentiating the literature and the information that other researchers had come up with (see Table 7). For this it was necessary to code articles by the overarching themes of past literature.
Table 7
Coding Headings

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Heading</th>
<th>Tab Color</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Socioeconomic status</td>
<td>Yellow</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Guidance</td>
<td>Red</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social and cultural capital</td>
<td>Light blue</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family background</td>
<td>Dark blue</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Financial aid and cost</td>
<td>Green</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The second aspect of the coding consisted of coding the material from the interviews and the journals. The journals were coded very simply: college desires were coded orange, career goals were coded pink and steps in order to obtain the goals were blue.

Upon getting the interviews completed, it was necessary to determine the specific elements that were addressed within the interviews. For this reason, some of the elements were changed (see Table 8). The second round of coding was as follows:

Table 8
Second Coding Headings

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Heading</th>
<th>Tab Color</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Opinions regarding Rosa Parks High School</td>
<td>Yellow</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Predisposition or college interest</td>
<td>Purple</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family and community support</td>
<td>Green</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Guidance and guidance program/curriculum</td>
<td>Red</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Career choices or future endeavors</td>
<td>Blue</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Different colors were used for the interviews and focus groups because we could not predict the responses that students were going to give prior to the interviews. After transcribing and reviewing the interviews it was necessary to restructure the coding that was previously completed to address all of the new elements that students referenced.
Once the focus groups and interviews were completed, it was evident that a more refined coding summary was needed. Instead of simply working on general overarching themes such as socioeconomic status, it was necessary to enhance the scheme and create more specific references to the experiences referenced by those individual who were interviewed. The information not adequately captured in the first coding scheme related to the predisposition and college interest of students, their opinions regarding Rosa Parks High School, and guidance and guidance programs/curriculum. For example, instead of having simply red as guidance there was a need to elaborate and include opinions about the school. The second set of codes consisted of the following categories: Desires and intent on attending college and career goals, college knowledge of the student, the academic experience, community and parental influence, and high school expectations versus student expectations. Each of these coding categories yielded discrete thematic analyses as elaborated in Chapter IV. For example, I report the results from the college knowledge coding on page 81. I report results from the family and community support on page 92. These coding schemes and been relied on throughout the analysis of the data.
CHAPTER IV
ANALYSIS

The intent of this study was to determine students' understanding and interpretation of higher education. From studying these students from their 10th grade year to their 12th grade year, the researcher, attempted to determine the influences that enhance or hinder students' interests in pursuing a degree from an institution of higher education. Through focusing on students' thought and beliefs, the study allows for a better understand of students' views about high school, higher education and the transition between the two.

This chapter is designed to describe the data from various interviews of the administration, staff, and students at Rosa Park's High School. Additional information was gained through surveys and journal prompts.

Desires and Intent on Attending College and Career Goals

The desires of the students were important to assess. It focused on the research question 2, which attempts to determine the career and college aspirations of the students at Rosa Parks High School. This also shed light on question seven and the expectations held by the staff at the high school.
Journal Prompts

Students, during their 10th grade year, were asked to complete a writing prompt in English class. The prompt asked the students to describe their goals for the future and the steps they needed to take in order to accomplish those goals. Sixty students completed the prompt. Fifty-five of the 60 students who completed the journal prompts identified specific interest in college. In fact, 21 provided specific schools that they were interested in attending.

Some of the colleges that students specifically identified were colleges such as Florida State University, Hunter College, Rutgers University, Clark University, Brown University, Duke University, and Delaware State College. Many students identified an interest in going to college but were not specific about area or the type of college they would like to attend.

Students had various career interests and aspirations. The largest categories for students were computers, law, medicine, and sports. Eleven of the students selected law as a career goal. The next most popular profession was sports, with 9 students interested in that field. Seven students were interested in medicine and 5 students intended on working with computers for a living. Otherwise, students were interested in owning their own business, fashion, the entertainment industry, teaching, and writing. Seven of the students were undecided about their career interests.

When the students wrote about the steps they needed to pursue in order to get their goals accomplished, many of the students referred to their environment. They were keenly aware of the negative influences surrounding them. One student said, "I need to study hard and stay away from negative things and images outside on the streets" (21).
Another student said that he/she had to, "Survive my years in high school. If I do survive here, apply to many colleges" (43). A third student expressed concern about getting out of college when he/she wrote, "It's hard to keep focus when you're surrounded by a world of negativity" (7).

The students also showed tentative plans, as opposed to concrete ideas, about their career and academic goals. "I want to play for Duke and that's the college I want to go to. First, I need to get good grades in high school and graduate. I need to stop acting bad in school and come to school more and complete my work in class. I think that is the step to get into college" (42). While this student had definite plans to attend Duke, the process needed to get into that school was too general. A second student said, "My goals for college are to get into it first. Then I will join an athletic sport (football, bowling, golf) to have more choices for my future career" (5). Again the student showed interest in college, but had no specific goals or plans for getting into the school.

Some students had specific goals related to high school, but when college was referenced, seemed to have little knowledge. For example, one student said, "First goal is to graduate from high school, but before I graduate, I must get 60 hours of community service. After I graduate, I will attend a college of my choice, with any major being technology. When I graduate college with my masters degree, I will try to open my own business" (14). This student did have a plan, but the plan was so vague that it was unclear as to whether the student truly understood the process of getting accepted and attending college. The fact that the student said, "open my own business" was another example of the tentative plans that many of the students express. The type of business and the
degrees needed to open a business were not discussed by the students and therefore seemed to be an afterthought.

Other students had multiple ideas of what they wanted as a career. While their plans were more developed, many of them had multiple aspirations. One student said, “First, I plan to attend an out of state college to further my education. I need to get my GPA back up to a 4.0 so I can better my chances of getting into a good school. Once I get into college, I can study psychology or criminal law. On the other side, I can pursue a career in acting or modeling. After I finish all the necessary courses needed, I will try to start my own psychology office or law program” (36). This particular example focused on the extremes that many of the students expressed. While the student wanted to pursue a career in law or psychology, the student also wanted to model. The student lacked a focus and understanding about what was necessary to follow each of these goals.

Another student stated, “My career for my future is to become a technician. I want to fulfill this goal by taking in everything I have to know about technology. My other goal is to learn about cars which is learning to become a mechanic. Some steps I need to take to make these goals it’s to go to college go in the fields of technology and mechanical” (46). This student seemed to be mixing two very different fields of study. There seemed to be no connection between the two career paths.

There were students who wrote very little in their response. However, it was evident that some thought had gone into their future plans. For example, one student referenced that she wanted to own an Escalade and have a big house. While there is no connection to education per se, there is still an expectation of wealth and stability within her statement. There were no students who refused to complete the journal prompt.
College Fair Survey

On the college fair survey, 138 of the 145, 11th grade respondents noted that they wanted to attend college. These students included many reasons for wanting to venture onto college. Some students expressed reasons such as, “I want to have a successful life” or “I want to further my education and get a good career.” The students seemed to desire going to college primarily as an opportunity to have more financial and personal success.

Other students signified more of a lifestyle change by attending college. One student said that he/she wanted to attend college, “To get out of the ghetto.” Another students expressed similar sentiments when he/she said, “I want to have a good life and not be in jail.” The students showed great maturity with the realization that the urban surroundings that they grew up in would not provide them with the career or financial opportunities they desired.

According to a guidance counselor at Rosa Parks High School, students came to her asking for a “safe school” (Interview 9). When she asked them what they meant, they told her that, “I can die around here” and they wanted a safe place to live and learn (Interview 9). Students understand the realities of living in an urban area where drugs and gang violence are extremely predominant.

Possibly because they had experienced such negative environmental factors, the students had an understanding of the necessity, both on a social and a financial level, of attending college. One student commented, “You have more success in life if you’re a college grad.” Another student said, “I want to do something with my life and become someone.”
Many students had the motivation to succeed in life. They wrote many comments regarding their positive attitude about attending college. “That is it! That is all I need; and want to thank God for a new beginning. Pray for me, I’m going to make it in this world” (17). A second journal stated, “The steps to reach this goals is mainly hard work, having confidence in yourself having support from loved ones and having determination are all key to success” (60). Many other students wanted the experience of college and hoped for their dreams of getting out of their neighborhood to come true (see Table 9).

Table 9
Students Future Plans

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Students</th>
<th>Extreme Plans</th>
<th>Specific Plans</th>
<th>Moderate Plans</th>
<th>Limited or No Plans</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Writing Prompts</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>College Surveys</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>133</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Focus Groups

As part of the focus group sessions, the researcher specifically asked students about their college expectations and desires. All but 2 of the students specified that they were interested in attending college. Therefore, the interest in attending college was prevalent throughout the students interviewed.

During the first focus group interviews, students were interested in going to college. They specified both schools and majors that they wanted to attend. Schools that were suggested were Seton Hall University, Laguna College, University of Florida,
Students' Desires to Attend Higher Education

Spelman College, Quinnipiac College, and Rutgers University. Regarding majors, students wanted to attend college for various career paths. Psychology, law, dance, fashion, and business were all majors that the students expressed interest in.

During one interview, one of the students said that she had thought about college for many years when she commented, “From when I was a little kid, I was like, ‘yeah, I’m going to college’” (Focus Group 3). Another student mentioned that everyone had been asking her if she was planning for college. Ten of the students explained that their desires to attend college had developed at a young age. Three other students’ identified middle school as the time in their lives when they began thinking of college. Two students said that high school influenced their decision to attend college.

The exposure to new experiences at the high school influenced students choices both related to college and in terms of a career choice. One student indicated that he had wanted to partake in culinary arts since he was in 9th grade and had exposure to that field. Another student became interested in college through football at the high school.

Some of the students did say their decisions had changed over the past few years. After being asked whether or not she had always had the ambition to attend college, 1 student said no because, “It’s too much we have to worry about money and stuff and then too much school” (Focus Group 4). That student continued and said, “All these tests you have to take and that is based on if you graduate or not. Plus there’s not enough hours in the day because me, I’m very, I’m never home because I’m always out trying to dance. School work, get home late, homework, it’s just, I want to sleep” (Focus Group 4). This particular student expressed being overwhelmed by coursework and extracurricular dance activities.
Two students wanted to wait because they felt stifled in the high school. One student said that she did not want to attend college right away. “I want to take a year off from school... just chill then go to college” (Focus Group 7). Another student said, “I don’t want to jump from high school to like college. I want to like have that first year like me time, take a little break then like next year or so go back to college” (Focus Group 2). One of the students that wanted a break first before attending college, realized that college was necessary when she said, “No, but I don’t really like school, but I need something to do. Minimum wage is not going to get me nowhere” (Focus Group 4).

Overall, the students did have the interest in attending college. They had known from a young age that their attendance in college would provide them with more financial security in the future. While the students were vague about the college process, their desire to attend was apparent from the interviews. Out of the 44 students interviewed in focus groups, 39 had plans on attending college immediately after high school. Three students wanted to take a year off to either earn money or take a break from academia. Two students were still in the process of considering attending college.

*Interviews*

The administration had different perspectives of students in the school. According to the administration, many of the students did not want to go onto college. “I would say 50-50. You have a large portion, the percentage of kids that just, they cringe at the sight or the sound even, or the thought of continuing school. They hate school so much. A lot of these kids are working full-time jobs already and, you know, they have no interest in seeking further education” (Interview 3).
A teacher believed that the students attending college might be less than the administrator believed. “For my classes maybe about 10 percent from each class which is not good you know but that's the reality" (Interview 1). Another teacher signified that roughly 3 of her 30 students in a class would actually attend college (Interview 12). This signified a great difference between what students expressed interest in participating in and what students actually decided to do after graduation.

During an interview with the 9th grade principal, he mentioned that he believed 90% of the students would say they would like to go to college. The rest would say that they wanted to continue school in some form such as a trade school. However, by mid-year of their 9th grade year, that percentage dropped by 10 percent.

A guidance counselor made a strong connection between predisposition and college knowledge when he told the researcher that, “Kids instinctually want to go to college. They grow up thinking 'yeah I’m going to college, I have to go to college, I want to go to college’, but they don’t know how” (Interview 10).

Predisposition does exist for these students. The students, administrators, teacher, and guidance counselors acknowledge it. This predisposition is one of the major components of college transition according to Hossler, Schmit and Vesper (1999) and McDonough (1997).

College Knowledge of the Student

This section provided research answers for research questions 1 and 3. It is necessary to determine what the students’ basic understanding of college is and what resources are available to them. Additionally, it is important to what the students
understand about the application and general college process of getting into college.

There is also part of question 6 in the section. By determining what students have learned from their guidance counselors, researchers can see what additional guidance or programs need to be implemented.

Writing Prompt

The students seemed to have little knowledge about college. Even though the predisposition existed, their knowledge beyond that was lacking in detail. When asked what steps they needed to take in order to obtain their goal of attending college, many students focused on getting out of high school. "I have to ensure that I do well in high school every cycle, semester and years" (3). Another student expressed, "First off I have to get everything together with my high school years because in order to get the college I want to attend... Right now, I don't know what I'm going to study but I'm pushing myself in high school" (24). The student had the idea of attending college, yet was not aware of the necessities that were involved in applying or attending college. Moreover, another student included, "I will study every night except for the weekends that my time. I will make a time for extracurricular activity but not too much" (25). This student particularly believed that studying alone would permit college admittance.

Occasionally, students would reference actual college information. "Maintain my GPA of a 4.0. Hopefully, I can get a good scholarship" (7). This student showed a connection between academic achievement and scholarship opportunity. Another student said, "First, I have to finish high school. Second I have to apply to a college that have majors in my career interests. After I have completed four years of college, I will search
for the job that I majored in college. Finally, I will have the career I have always wanted” (11). This student mentioned a knowledge of the sequence of attending college. There was evidence that he/she understood that the application process was the first step. Once that was complete, the student would pick a major, graduate and find a career.

Another student wrote, “My goal or my college career goals is to go Miami State University for 6 years for studying criminal law. The steps to complete in order to reach my goals is do well in high school so I could get a scholarship for Miami State University and when I get their do the best and succeed in college” (52). This particular student identified a particular school, but seemed unaware of the expectations he/she needed to meet in order to get into a large state university. Additionally, the reference to 6 years showed a lack of knowledge regarding the undergraduate programs at most universities.

A few students did have ideas about what they wanted to pursue as a career choice, but their information was incorrect. One student informed the team, “My goals are to be a pediatrician. The steps I need to complete this goal is to go to college for the whole 4 years and then I think 2 more years if I am right. Past college then be a pediatrician and help kids” (38). The lack of understanding about undergraduate and medical school in conjunction with the academic expectation was not expressed in this journal.

Another student said, “My college and career goals are to go to Delaware State College. And after I’ve had finished college I plan on being a news reporter. In order to complete these goals I must go to school every day also write a lot and get into a lot of journalism and I will have to travel a lot” (39). This student believed that by writing a significant amount of material, he/she would be able to enter the field of journalism.
Yet another student showed confusion when he/she wrote, “I would like to be a fashion designer. My goals are to graduate from high school move on straight to college get a part time job while in college. Graduate from college get a job in that field or fashion then go back to college to become a lawyer” (49). Being a lawyer and a fashion designer are two completely different fields. Through comments like this, it was evident that the students were not aware of the expectations and rigors of certain professions.

Focus Groups

During the first set of focus groups, students had some general ideas about where they wanted to attend college. Many of the students had determined whether they wanted to attend school right after college or take a break from education. They also had determined if they wanted to stay within a certain distance of their hometown. Some students wanted to travel far away, yet other students were very clear that they wanted to be close to the area. Other students identified specific schools and areas of study they wanted to pursue.

But similar to the journals, some of the students were less direct about their answers. One student mentioned that she was interested in Rutgers University but then said, “I don’t even know, I just know I want to go I don’t know why” (Focus Group 4). Yet another student seemed to have a general answer saying, “With me, any school that has a major in computers. Any school that majored in computers I wanted to go. I mean, I might stay up here, I might not” (Focus Group 5).

One student was so disheartened by high school that he did not want to continue. He was concerned about the financial requirements of college. “I hate high school—if I
go to college it's the same thing as high school—people say like college is better because you have card parties and freedom. You finish college you got a student loan you gotta pay and all that” (Focus Group 2). It was this same student however, that approached the researcher a few months later during the second round of interviews. He was so excited to come visit and share the news that he was looking at going into college because of the conversation and the information he learned from the session.

One student seemed to mimic this young man's views in a focus group. The student mentioned, “We keep ourselves inspired. When people come out to talk out to us and talk to us about going to college, it makes us feel like someone cares” (Focus Group 8).

Other students were more daunted by the college process. “Right now, everybody's struggling; you got to like, have your plan, like I want to do this, I want to do that” (Focus Group 3). A number of students expressed a feeling of pressure on them right now. Between high school and college information, they felt overwhelmed (Focus Group 3).

Many of the students indicated that other students tended to show interest in college simply to gain acceptance among peers. For example, when asked about whether they discuss their plans with their friends: “They say it to say it..to like compete. Oh I'm going to like—Pittsburgh and next person will say West Virginia, compete like from school to school” (Focus Group 2).

In another interview, a student mentioned that many of her friends “say” they’ll go to college, but she dismissed their claims because she did not actually think they would end up attending. One student suggested that he feels only 20% of the student
Students' Desires to Attend Higher Education

body actually wanted to attend college, while the others just talked about attending (Focus Group 7). Another student agreed with this last statement and said that out of his friends, “A couple of them say they do (want to attend college), but I don’t think they all do” (Focus Group 7).

A point of interest was that many students were interested in going to college for particular areas but were not involved in these areas in high school. One student informed the researcher that she was interested in fashion design and modeling. However, she was not in fashion club or any extracurricular activities. Another student expressed interest in going to school for basketball, but he informed the group that his knee had snapped, so he has not been on the team for the past 2 years. While the students showed interest in these areas, they had little experience in the field of study and there seemed to be a disconnect between the careers students would like to have and the activities that they were involved in on the high school level.

At the end of the interviews, the researcher asked students if they were aware of how to look for colleges. A large portion of the students replied with a no. They were unaware of Internet resources such as The College Board. They were not privy to information regarding scholarships. The students said that they were not aware that there were so many scholarships available to them. For example, the researcher informed the students that there were scholarships for left-handed people or students from urban settings. When the researcher handed them information the students all picked up a packet. It seemed as though this was their first experience actually discussing college as a possibility.
Interviews

During an interview with one of the guidance counselors it became apparent that the director of the guidance department primarily handled the scholarship process. The counselors had little knowledge of the scholarship process and the requirements. This director often took the top 10 to 15 percent of the high academically achieving students and discussed possible scholarships for college. However, this guidance counselor disagreed with that format and believed, “In terms of our kids, more kids should be, it should be open to more kids. They should have more exposure to be able to get a scholarship” (Interview 10).

Regarding the SAT’s there was an interesting dilemma that the researchers came upon at the school. According to the administration, all students were required to take an SAT course. However, when discussing this with the students, many of them were unaware that there was even a course offered for the SAT’s. Since many of the students did not actually pick their courses, they were unaware of the programs of study available to them throughout their high school career.

One of the guidance counselors said that the students were not, “Required to take it, but we try to get 89 percent of the student body” to take the SAT course (Interview 11). However, when speaking with another guidance counselor about what more could be done to assist the guidance department in getting the students to college, he said given the money, “We would have intense SAT and ACT courses, you know kids, their not testing well at all and that’s a big factor” (Interview 9). Since this guidance counselor and the
students were unaware of the course being offered, there must have been a miscommunication between the administration and the staff and students.

The guidance department identified some unrealistic goals coming from students. “You know some have illusions of grandeur, they just say ‘okay, I am applying to Harvard, and I’m gonna apply to Harvard.’ You have a 1.2 GPA like and it’s just because you know they don’t understand. A lot of them have not ventured outside of this area” (Interview 9). The students seemed to lack the knowledge about what colleges expect for acceptance.

Another counselor agreed and said that many of the students did not understand what their GPA meant and how that effected their college choices. “I think that’s where guidance counselors come in. Just to tell them, you know very frank with the kids, it’s not where you start but where you finish” (Interview 10). This particular counselor continued by stating that many students grew up thinking they were going to attend college yet lack the initiative and knowledge about what college entails. “They just say I’m going” (Interview 10). Students, according to this guidance counselor, felt that just by filling out an application guaranteed acceptance. The students had little knowledge about the expectations of the college (Interview 10).

Regarding a timeline for college planning however, the guidance department seemed to be behind in the process. According to the College Board (2008), most applications were due between January 1 and February 15th. Students should have completed their applications, letters of recommendations, and college essays by this time. The information should have been submitted. However, this was not occurring.
According to one of the guidance counselors, she was proud that at least half of her seniors have applied to at least one college by March (Interview 9).

Another guidance counselor said that he worked primarily with the seniors. In the fall he began making sure that the students’ transcripts were acceptable and that the students had completed the necessary requirements to graduate from high school. However, at this point, he should have been discussing college options with the students and the students should have been working on their applications (Interview 11). The school was not being proactive about the application process. Instead, they were being more reactive to the process.

Academic Experience

This section focuses on research questions 4 and 7. First, the research questions allow the researcher to decipher what type of academic experiences the students have had. Secondly, the information related to the students’ academic experience sheds light on to the expectations held by the staff of the high school.

College Fair Survey

Regarding academic preparedness, the students seemed aware that they needed to succeed in high school in order to get into college. Twenty-three of the 60 students discussed getting high grades or completing courses in order to continue onto college. Only 2 students mentioned passing the state exam or the SAT. Three of the students explained their interested in maintaining or getting to a 4.0 status on their transcripts.
On the college fair feedback forms, however, many of the students were unaware of the basic expectation that colleges require. One student wrote that he learned that he needed to, “Try to do my best because they look at our grades during junior year” (9). Another student signified academic preparedness and financial need. He learned that he, “Can go for free with good grades”. On the other side, some students learned that college was about more than just applying. One student said that he learned that, “College is hard to get into”. Similarly another student wrote, “I have to work a lot harder” (106).

Many students realized that colleges had various majors and many different opportunities. One student wrote that, “A lot of colleges have my major” (67). Yet another student mentioned that she was surprised that, “You can have more than one major” (2).

Focus Groups
The focus groups shed more light onto the academic preparedness of students. Each interview had a section about life at Rosa Park’s High School. The students were asked to reflect about their classes, social life, and expectations at the high school. Many students were displeased with their high school experience.

There were particular elements of school that students were unhappy with at Rosa Parks High School. While the students did not directly discuss their grades or their personal strength or weaknesses in the classroom, many of them acknowledged that most of the classes were lecture based with little hands-on learning.

One student mentioned that teachers in the school were often not aware of the level of student understanding. “I like teachers, like they gonna have to lecture, but they
Students’ Desires to Attend Higher Education

got to make sure that the students understand what you talking about because some teachers just be talking and talking and talking. You don’t understand nothing they say” (Focus Group 4). Another student added, “I think they talk a lot. See, I am a visual person; someone has to show me something to be learning. If someone tells me something I don’t get it, you have to show me it. It’s easy to be talking” (Focus Group 4). The students understood how they learned and were trying to express that throughout the interviews.

One student felt that teachers gave preference to athletes. He explained that he liked feeling respected, “Everybody—teachers, students, everybody in the building. Teachers definitely (respect athletes), they gonna give some good grades like last year, I got a B or in all of my classes” (Focus Group 2). This double standard set the wrong tone for students. The students should have been treated equally regardless of extracurricular activities.

In other classes, students often highlighted classes they enjoyed because of particular teachers. “Good teacher makes a good class. Good teachers make it not boring cause when it’s boring, students lose focus” (Focus Group 3). Examples of this difference in teaching style were exemplified through 2 students’ comments. One student mentioned a social studies teacher, “He don’t even teach. He just give you the work right out of the book” (Focus Group 7). Later, another student described a Spanish teacher who “teaches Spanish to us and she dances and tries to get the students to dance with her” (Focus Group 7). Many of the students explained in detail what they enjoyed and disliked about teachers. The teachers who were engaging and motivating were identified as the good teachers. The teachers who copied information from the textbook and lectured were
explained to be the less desirable teachers. The students felt a desire to be engaged with the curriculum.

Generally, students received little homework in their classes. They were required to study for tests, but otherwise, little work was given outside of the school day. A student told the researcher that as long as a student took good notes and paid attention, it was easy to obtain straight A’s. This lack of homework might be due to the lack of assignments completed. A teacher described student attitudes towards homework when she stated, “I find that a lot of students don’t do any homework at all; I am constantly on the phone because they don’t do homework and I think that’s the major problem in our school, is that kids don’t realize that education is your priority and it has to be, they have to do homework” (Interview 1). Many teachers might not have provided homework simply because the students did not complete the assignments given.

Five of the students acknowledged that college would be more difficult than Rosa Park’s High School. Two of the students, during two different interviews, admitted a fear of failing in college. When prompted what they were scared of one student said, “Going to college and failing” (Focus Group 7). Another student mentioned that she was afraid to flunk out and said, “I am a lazy person. I do not like doing work” (Focus Group 4). The fear of failure could have been a deterrent in college attendance.

*Interviews*

The vice principal admitted that some of the students might not be as prepared to attend college as they should be.
“Oh, just a lack of motivation. Sometimes they’re not, they’re not as prepared as they should be. You know, you’ve got some kids that might skate by, and then when they get to college, you know, it’s not something you can do anymore. You know, you don’t have the set structures as you do in high school, where if you miss class, the teacher’s going to call your house. You know, if you misbehave, uh, an administrator, will, you know, make it a point to have parent conferences. They don’t do that in college. You fail a class, it’s on you. You fail a class. You know. So, I think it’s a big transition for the kids. And I think they have a tough time dealing with that transition.” (Interview 3)

While there was acknowledgement of the transition concern, nothing had been done to assist the students with the continuation of education.

A guidance counselor agreed and said he had heard from alumni from the school. “They have come back to me and felt like they wasn’t prepared enough” (Interview 11). The former students had discussed they felt they were not given enough work and that, “In college, the professors said, I want you to read outside chapters and they don’t care what other classes you have, so for them it is more intense there and they were not exposed” (Interview 11). The feedback the guidance department was given did not seem to be used on a reform level. Nothing different had occurred in the school because of the alumni making those statements.
Community and Parental Influence

This section touches upon question 1 and 7. It is necessary to determine the students' basic understanding of college. Many of the students' counterparts have gained information from parents and community members. It is important to see if these individuals have been exposed to the same information. Additionally, the expectations held from the school staff are generated from the community and parents.

Focus Groups

Many students showed interest in a profession simply because of a family member being involved in that profession. One student said that she was interested in nursing because her mother was a nurse. Another student wanted to be a businessman like his father. The student was unfamiliar with what his father actually did but had ambitions of having the same title. One of the coordinators of the 9th grade school believed that students' families were crucial in providing college expectations. Students had an allegiance with their families so if the family stresses college-going tenets, the students often follow the guidance (Interview 2).

The students spoke about their parents and many of them said that they were somewhat guided by their parents. One student talked about his father being more involved if he was in trouble, "It is usually when I get in trouble because if I am not in trouble he don't say nothing to me, but I got my report card this year he was like oh you need to start taking the SAT’s and this is the most important year and colleges going to be looking at you" (Focus Group 7). Another student said, "My parents support me to the
fullest. My brother went to college and my sister. They support me all the way” (Focus Group 2). The parent influence seemed to be prevalent for the students. If it was not the parents, the students found other relatives that were encouraging of their college going experiences.

Students tended to see their older siblings or parents as support. Those students who had older siblings, relatives, or parents who attended college, saw them as motivators. A student signified that her older brother kept her “on track” and made sure she was making the correct choices both in and out of school (Focus Group 3). Another student said that her uncles went to college and that influenced her. Not only was the family connection important, but socio-economic status was important to the students as well.

One student described college and how it was important for him to attend a college where there were similar students of race and socio-economic status. The students had seen two schools. One of the schools was a private college that caters to primarily middle to upper class students. The other college was a state funded university with a more diverse population. His opinion about the private school was that, “It was alright but I don’t think I’d fit in there” (Focus Group 4). The student’s opinion about the public school was that he felt “comfortable”. When asked about his experiences at the two schools, the student said that “I just feel good, like walk around see the same people I see around here” (Focus Group 4). He noticed the difference in both socio-economic status and race between the two schools and had made his decision about attending the schools based on those factors.
Interviews

The administration had a very different outlook on family influence on the students. To them, while the family was supportive of the student attending college, money and knowledge was not available. "You know, our students, a large percentage of our students come from single-family backgrounds. A large percentage of our students are the head of the households. You know, that's so much responsibilities, that they, they, don't make it through college, you know. So it's very easy to lose focus in college" (Interview 3). The administrator viewed the reality that many of the students needed to take care of their own families prior to helping themselves. Even though college would have been beneficial to the student, the family needed the student for monetary support.

The administrator continued by saying that a lot of the students did not attend college due to family background concerns.

"The obvious thing is, we're considered a Title I school, which means I would say over 80% of our kids come from socioeconomic status that would be considered, poor. I think the definition for poverty line is, which would be considered poor, is an annual income of 20,000 with four people in the family. Plus a lot of people are on welfare, and eat free lunch. A large percentage of our kids come from single-parent households. Other variables, like the culture, gang activity, drugs, violence, are part of, a large of, uh, our students' lives. A very large part, and you know, so I think those are the variables that make it difficult for us to, you know, try to maintain our focus in education." (Interview 3)
Many of the students concurred with the vice-principal and said they were concerned about the financial responsibilities that college brought. One student expressed this concern when he said, “At first I wasn’t going to go to college because I know my parents are struggling and I didn’t want to put them in that financial state. But I realized that if I go to college, I could just get grants and loans” (Interview 7). The student understood that college was necessary for him to help his family later in life. He would have more financial opportunities with a college degree.

One of the guidance counselors found her job difficult when it came to FAFSA information. “It’s difficult to say, okay you know a parent realistically, is not going to come here and sit down with me and do your FAFSA, but it’s just difficult to explain the process to people who don’t know and to get someone to give up their personal information when they feel so defensive” (Interview 2). This added another level to the guidance concern. Not only did the guidance department have difficulty getting the students to complete the necessary application for college, but then assisting the students with financial forms without the necessary information from parents was impossible.

High School Expectations Versus Student Expectations

This section solely focuses on research question 7. It is important to determine the expectations held by the staff and determine how that differs from the expectations of the students. If there is a disconnect there, the gap must be limited in order to assist students in gaining acceptance into college.
Focus Groups

Considering that the college fair the researcher ran was the first ever college fair in the school, it was evident that the administration did not have a particular interest in or ability to educate their students about college. Many of the students expressed interest in college simply because they attended the college fair. According to one of the guidance counselors, some students were invited to attend a college fair offsite. However, these students were chosen based on grade point average (Interview 8). Therefore, it seems as though many of the students would be neglected from the fair. These fairs could encourage and influence students' choices in the future. There should no be a limit on who attends the fair.

One student expressed her enthusiasm after the college fair by saying that she learned, "there is a variety of colleges, and I think that I would have a chance"(29). Another student mimicked that sentiment by writing that she believed, "my future looks bright and I have a long road ahead of me"(1).

Some students seemed to be exposed to more information about college. One student identified that she learned, "How to get ready for college and my expenses." Another student realized, "When you go out of state it is harder to get financial support." Another student seemed relieved that she would be supported on a college level. She reported to the researchers that she learned that colleges, "Show you a lot of support" (84). Most students, however, seemed surprised that they would have support on a college level. This monetary and guidance support seemed to ease some of the students concerns about college.
The focus groups were distinct in showing how students interpreted the school, teachers, and expectations. Many of the students were unaware of the college process and felt as though they were not supported in the area of college transition. During the focus group interviews, many of the students had not seen their counselors frequently. “She never calls me down we talk about nothing. I don’t even know her. I don’t appreciate that” (Focus Group 7). Some of the students were even unsure of the last time they had spoken with their counselor.

Apparently, the guidance program did not focus on college admissions but more on grades and school progress. One student said, “I seen my guidance counselor like twice this year, once last year. All she talked about was grades” (Focus Group 7). Another student said that she got called to her guidance counselor to, “Talk about my grades—If I’m passing, but that’s it” (Focus Group 4). There was little college guidance in the department. The counselors were more focused on graduation requirements.

Very few of the students had discussions with their counselors about college. After being asked about these conversations, one student shouted, “I ain’t done none of that—I’m upset” (Focus Group 7). One student said, “You can’t really talk to your guidance counselor as much cause he has so much to do as it is so I try to do my own research versus trying to ask him” (Focus Group 4). Another student agreed and said, “Every time I go there to see him, he is never really in the office. I never can catch him and when I do he’s busy” (Focus Group 4). These sentiments showed that the students were frustrated about their interactions with the counselors.

One student felt very upset when this topic came up and said, “They don’t guide us. They help us with our schedules” (Focus Group 4). The student continued to say,
"They don’t guide, no they don’t. They don’t believe because they...I think they have favorites. And that’s not good when you have favorites because there are other people that want to get involved in activities" (Focus Group 4). The students saw this favoritism when the head of the guidance department picked particular students to look at colleges. The other students were not exposed to that same attention or guidance.

The students had only seen their guidance counselors once or twice that year. During those visits, the conversation consisted of scheduling and grades as opposed to college counseling. “My guidance counselor, he is okay to me because like, he let me know what things I need and he tell me that I need to take certain classes by the end of high school. But the only thing bad is they need more because they don’t spend enough time with us about college and stuff” (Focus Group 4). The guidance department was so small, that the students did not get the college counseling they were desperately in need of during their senior year.

While the students did not feel supported through the guidance department, many of the students also felt as though they were not supported throughout their 3 years at the high school. They mentioned that they felt disrespected and not taken seriously by administrators or teachers. One student said, “[in] high school they treat you like elementary. In college they treat you more like adults” (Focus Group 3). This lack of guidance may have been the catalyst for this feeling.

Students often made references to hall sweeps and lack of freedom in the hallways. Another student said that sometimes people were suspended for no reason. Students seemed to feel as though their freedom was restricted in the school and felt that
college would provide the freedom they were interested in having. Other students identified the principal and wished he were stricter with the students.

When asked about the teacher, one student said that the teachers “Don’t care” (Focus Group 7). One student actually said, “You see the teachers; they’re bored” (Focus Group 3). In another description of the teachers, one student said, “They act like they the ones on top of the world” (Focus Group 7). The culture of the school was negative for both the students and the teachers.

**Interviews**

One of the teachers agreed with the students when she commented, “Even with the teachers that do love [the principal], even they are apathetic about teaching, and in the school environment they think things will be different” (Interview 1). If the teacher acknowledged that there were colleagues who were lacking in engaging the students, then there were definite reasons to alter the teaching expectations.

Other students referred to teachers who did not believe that the students could succeed. A few teachers were identified as having low expectations of the students. One student said, while talking about a Spanish teacher, “She thinks she is like gold so godly. She told all the seniors that they not going to graduate because they didn’t want to do Spanish. You don’t tell nobody you not going to graduate” (Focus Group 7). Another student agreed and said that the teacher “keeps saying like some people from [here] don’t make it in college” (Focus Group 7). If the teachers were negative about the students excelling in college, the students would have reservations about their abilities on the college level.
When discussing the state exam, one of the students stated that many of the teachers expressed low expectations from the students. “They all smart and they tell us we are going to fail” (Focus Group 7). Other students concurred with that student and added, “or say you gonna pass language arts, they will say none of y’all are going to pass math” (Focus Group 7). While there was a low passing rate on the state test, the teachers were supposed to encourage and support the students instead of lowering the students’ self-esteem.

One of the students expressed that the student and teacher relationship was important. The student said, “Some teachers can’t handle the students, they’re afraid” (Focus Group 4). When asked to clarify this statement she said that the students were, “too wild” (Focus Group 4). This is was significant because if the classes were too chaotic, then students were not able to learn and thus were unable to prepare adequately for the state exam.

Students did have particular teachers that they connected with during their high school experience. One student commented on a history teacher who, “goes over a lot of stuff. He is funny especially when he is going off on his brothers” (Focus Group 7). Another student talked about a computer teacher who assisted the students. “She help us if we need help. She explains to us how to do it and we do it on the computer. It’s fun on the computer” (Focus Group 7). The students were relating to teachers who enhanced their learning and also supported their academic interests.

A number of the students felt they enjoyed class when they could relate it to their own lives or when technology was used. One student said that one teacher, “Goes around and explains stuff. He related to real life” (Focus Group 7). Another teacher, “Talks to us
Students’ Desires to Attend Higher Education

[the students] about college. He talks about slavery. He talks about the hood. He lets us watch clips about history on the overhead” (Focus Group 7). The interaction helped students learn and they appreciated this style.

One teacher was interviewed by the researcher. The students felt that she was very helpful when it came to the state exam and preparing for college. The students acknowledged that she always tried to assist them and this made her a good teacher. The teacher explained the curriculum by saying, “Well, it is not written in our curriculum, but I make it a point to. For example, I do a whole, for two weeks, which I am not supposed to do—I do a whole college workshop; I take them into the lab and we do SAT applications online and I do things like that. I do my own little college tours, things of that nature” (Interview 1). However, this teacher did continue to say that while there were many other teachers who probably took on a personal role in the students lives, there were many other teachers who did not. “I think most teachers think it’s the guidance counselors’ responsibility and leave it at that” (Interview 1). There was a lack of connection that existed between the school staff and the students.

Conversely, one of the guidance counselors asserted that he did work with students and English teachers. “What we’ve tried to do now is we’ve worked with some of the English teacher to say, ‘okay they need to do personal statements [seniors]. So, maybe you can incorporate that into your classroom to give them an assignment to write a personal statement. Then you can review it; help them edit it. Then by that time they’ll bring it to me and I’ll review it” (Interview 7). While this may have been true, according to the English teacher, there was no room in the curriculum for the additional assignment and she was not supposed to teach that content. Through discussion with teachers and
administrators, and then gaining information from the students, it was evident there was a miscommunication between what was being told to researchers and what was actually occurring in the classrooms.

According to the students, the administration apparently had shown low expectations of the students. During a focus group interview, the students mentioned a teacher who attempted to take the students to Spain and immerse the students in the culture. The administration would not approve of the trip. According to one student, “They limit us. Like, when she went to Spain they was telling her that she couldn’t do it and that it wasn’t going to happen and you’re setting your standards too high” (Focus Group 4). The student said that the teacher had told the students what the administration had expressed. This lack of expectation only made the students upset and angry. The students were not the only people in the school who were getting mixed signals. Many of the teachers and guidance counselors experienced this same problem.

The administration interviews proved to have a very different view on the students and the expectations held throughout the school. During an interview with the vice principal he said, “I mandate that my guidance counselors meet with every one of their kids three times a year, at minimum. And within one of those meetings, they need to discuss career choices and opportunities when they get out of school. Even as sophomores we want them to meet with them and discuss opportunities for them” (Interview 3). In a later interview with one of the guidance counselors, she mentioned that she was required to meet with each student twice a year. “We have to meet with every student in the building twice…and it seems usually I meet with them at least once and in general when they trickle in and out many times” (Interview 9).
Another incident where this miscommunication occurred was exemplified when the vice-principal was asked whom a student should go to for college information. The vice principal said, “The first step is the guidance counselor. The key person they would coordinate that with is their guidance counselor to help with the application process, recommendations. The guidance counselor is the go-to person when it comes to wanting to go to college” (Interview 3). While the vice-principal expected the information to come from the guidance counselor it was not.

When the head of guidance was interviewed and asked to describe the facilities in the guidance office that promote college transition, the head of guidance said only, “We try to steer them toward thinking about what kind of career they envision themselves in, in the future and then we try to lead them to doing some research on whether or not they really want to pursue that particular career. And we try to always drive home the difference between a career and a job” (Interview 5). There was no reference to college, but rather conversation about jobs. If students are not provided with information about their opportunities, they will not believe that college is an option for them.

One of the guidance counselors continued that thought when she said, “Normally the expectations about going to college come from the student. The students are self-motivated either from home, sports activities, church, etc. and have the desire to go to college” (Interview 8). The guidance counselor alluded to the fact that students gained knowledge about the process of high education through alternate places.

There was little to stimulate conversation about college in this high school. The idea of a college fair was accepted in theory, however the school had never created one for its students. The school relied on outside fairs and programs to educate the students
Students' Desires to Attend Higher Education

on college admissions, expectations and programs. Students had to find alternate locations to attend a college fair. “We have college fairs. Either kids attend college fairs within Newark or out of district or within colleges themselves” (Interview 3). However, students were not often aware of outside college fairs and were not given the information about those fairs. When asked about college fairs at Rosa Parks High School he said, “No, we don’t have one here. We don’t. We probably should create one. It’s a lot of work, but I know we tried” (Interview 3). There was no college fair, the guidance department was not educating the students and there was nothing in the curriculum to assist the student in their college search.

According to the vice principal, a considerable number of the students had trouble filling out the applications for both the college entrance and the scholarships. “Again, getting the kids to even apply for scholarship is one of the difficult things the guidance department faces. You know, they’re constantly advertising, making announcements on the PA system, calling kids down. But the application process in itself, you have to fill out all that paperwork. I don’t think they get as much response as they want” (Interview 3). While this might have been true, if students were not given the necessary skills to complete the forms, then the students were not supported enough.

There were many disconnections among the students, teachers, staff, and administrators in the school. While the school functioned on a day-to-day schedule, the school was not preparing students to enter higher education. People expected other departments to handle certain guidance elements. However, when no one actually took responsibility for preparing students, it was the students who suffered.
The purpose of this research study was to determine how students from Rosa Parks High School obtain information about college and how their high school experience enhances or hinders their continuation into college. It was necessary to understand the students’ perspectives as well as the views of the administration and guidance counselors. Administrations and guidance counselors were interviewed. Moreover, eight focus groups were created to determine how the students felt about the college process and how their experiences at Rosa Parks High School influenced their opinions about education. Through the analysis of journal prompts and college fair feedback forms, the researcher was able to determine what goals and prior knowledge the students had regarding college expectations and requirements. It also gave the researcher an idea of whether or not students had the predisposition to attend college. While some of the results proved consistent with past studies, other results shed new light on the issues of students’ attitude and knowledge about college.

Findings

The overall findings of this study showed that students were interested in attending college and had support. However, the students were lacking in college knowledge. The students identified lack of counseling and being unfamiliar with basic college knowledge as their primary reason for not going to college. Very little information was disseminated to the students throughout their time at Rosa Parks High
School. For this reason, even though students had the predisposition to attend, many of them may not follow through with their plans due to lack of knowledge.

Many of the students did refer to their socioeconomic status (SES), cultural and social capital when discussing college, however it did not seem to impact their decisions. Some students even acknowledged that it motivated them to continue on to college. They described their environment as the “ghetto” and wished to raise their SES, social capital, and cultural capital.

Financial concerns were an issue for many of the students. One student specifically referenced originally not wanting to attend college due to lack financial resources. However, the student then said he decided to attend college and pay back loans so that he could assist his parents later in life. He said that he would have a higher salary with a better education and this was a way he could provide for his family.

Regarding family relationships, many students said that their parents and relatives were influential in their decisions. The students in the focus groups said that their parents were supportive of their decisions. While some students were first generation college students, they did reference family members who were significant influence on their decisions.

Regarding the students’ friends, many of the students interviewed felt that their friends supported their choice. Even though their friends might not be attending college, the students identified that their friends were supportive and eager for them to go on to college.

The college process was very foreign to the students at Rosa Parks High School. When asked if they had been searching for colleges, about half of the students said no.
There was little searching or discussion regarding the college process. Students had not been exposed to the expectations held by colleges.

The guidance department is so overwhelmed with scheduling and discipline that they were unable to see the students on any regular basis. Only 9 of the 44 students in the focus groups had worked with their guidance counselors on college information. Many of the students, as 11th graders, had only seen their counselors once or twice that year. Moreover, many of the students simply talked to their guidance counselors about their schedules, not about their plans for college. There was some information given by an English teacher at the school, but not all of the teachers shared information on college preparedness. While many of the students wanted to go to college, they were unsure of where to gain information.

The students identified being interested in college. Their goals were to continue onto college and then join the work force. Many of them desired careers in the business, education, or entertainment fields. The staff however was not always as optimistic. According to the students, a couple of the teachers were very negative regarding the students' ability to pass the state exam. The vice principal said that half of the students would end up going to college and so the school often focused on getting the students into the workforce, "the reason why we're an educational institution is to prepare our kids to become part of the work force, become a part of overall society, and that's the reason why we try to expose them to as much as we possibly can" (Interview 3).

Many of the students the researcher spoke with were interested in going onto college. They identified individuals who were supportive in their choices. The reason the students often did not attend was due to lack of college knowledge. They were unaware of the
Students’ Desires to Attend Higher Education

expectations and requirements in order to gain entrance into college. For example, in the college fair survey, 138 of the 145 11th grade respondents noted that they wanted to attend college. While that is 95% of the 11th graders surveyed, the actual percentage is much less. In 2007, only 53% of members of the 12th grade class were planning to attend college. In 2006, the statistics were greater with 71.5% of the students who planned to attend college. In 2005, 64.7% of the 12th grade class was going to attend college (State of New Jersey Department of Education, 2007).

Findings That Concurred with Past Research

The most predominant elements of the study that correlated with past research were the guidance preparation and academic readiness. To a lesser degree, the researcher found connections with cultural and social capital expectations within the school, and financial concerns of the students.

The guidance preparation that students were exposed to at the high school was lacking. Often the guidance department is forced to handle the bulk of the college information. In addition, counselors often had to handle discipline issues, social concerns, and parental needs. When the counselors were interviewed, it was evident that there were too many students on their caseload and too little time to assist the students.

According to McDonough (2004), guidance staff needed to be active in working with students who planned on attending college. However, at Rosa Parks High School, the students did not experience this guidance related to college information. The students had only seen their guidance counselors a couple of times during the school year. When the students did see their counselors, the meetings focused primarily on graduation
requirements or course requirements. Kirst and Venezia (2004), agreed and stated, “There is an increasingly limited number of counselors per student at the high school level, and few counselors are able to spend a majority of their time on postsecondary issues. The counselors who are there focus on a host of other issues...and do not have the time to work with traditionally underrepresented students” (p. 14). Kirst and Venezia (2004) also state that without the appropriate college and career counseling, students’ opportunities are limited and thus have inadequate preparations for college (p. 301). The lack of college guidance at Rosa Parks High School often left students without knowledge about higher academia. The caseload of each counselor was roughly 350 students. There was not enough time for the counselors to guide their students on high school matters while also guiding them on college entrance expectations.

The students expressed this loss of time during the focus group interviews. One student said after being asked how often she had seen her counselor, “Once this year and it’s terrible to say... I think that’s her job to call me down” (Focus Group 7). Two other students said that they had met with their counselors for the first time this year, a few days before the interview (Focus Group 3).

McDonough (2004) stated, “counselors influence students’ aspirations, plans, enrollments, and financial aid knowledge. Meeting frequently with a counselor increases a student’s chance of enrolling in a four-year college.” Without the students being actively guided throughout their high school career, it was less likely the students would attend college. The students at Rosa Parks High School had not experienced this connection with their counselors. For this reason, many expressed tentative plans about college and were unspecific with career choices.
Students mentioned goals such as, “My goals for college are to get into it first. Then I will join an athletic sport (football, bowling, golf) to have more choices for my future career” (5). Another student said that, “When I graduate from school, I plan to go to college and get ready for my future career” (26). It was possible that since the students had no exposure to their guidance counselors and did not have the knowledge from a family member at home, that the students were unsure of how to continue with their goals.

Additionally, if students did have an interest in college, they were expected to find out information on their own and complete applications independently. Many of the students were not exposed to college discussions. Students were unaware of expectations held by colleges for admissions and for this reason, many students believed that simply by applying, there was a guarantee in admittance. Even when students were applying to college, the guidance department put much of the requirements on the student. “We are always pushing them to make the moves they are not proactive as far as following up on things. Even mailing out stuff, they will give you all the applications to mail out so after a while I say stop that they have to mail out their own. I will check their application I will review it, I will sit down with them, but they have to mail it” (Interview 11). If students are already not attending college, it seems counter productive to stop assisting students. The students are in need of more guidance instead of less guidance. McDonough (1997) agreed and stated, “a first-generation college-bound senior is operating in what for her is uncharted waters and is facing a high degree of uncertainty, both in what college choices to make and how to make appropriate ones. The level of influence any counseling operation has on an individual’s behavior is related to the degree of uncertainty it helps
the individual absorb” (p. 100). It was necessary that the guidance department assist the students in their college searches instead of creating more uncertainty and concern about the process.

Even though students had expressed interest in going to college in 10th and 11th grade, one guidance counselor expressed pride when half of the 12th graders on her caseload had already applied to at least one college in March. However, according to the College Board (2008a), this was a delay in the application process. The applications were due between January 1 and February 15th. If students were applying in March, they were applying late. Gladieux and Swail (1998) agreed and referenced Rendon who said, “The groundwork for both must be laid early [aspirations and academic preparation] ‘by the time students reach the twelfth grade, it is too late to…increase the numbers of students who are ready for college” (p. 5). Not being proactive for college was setting students up for failure. Many of the fall spots would be taken already by the time these students were applying to the schools.

Another concern about why the students might not be transitioned into college was the lack of academic preparedness at the high school. Many of the students had not passed the state exam in a traditional format and therefore, may not have been academically prepared for college. While the state test was not the sole determinate of success, there was a lack of consistency between tests and grade point averages. Many of the students had high grade point averages, but had low state testing scores or had low SAT scores. A guidance counselor agreed and said, “Their GPA’s high but their SAT’s are low” (Interview 11). According to the guidance counselor, the valedictorian of the school had earned a roughly a 400 on both the math and critical reading portions of the
SAT. According to the College Board, the mean average SAT score for college bound seniors was 502 for critical reading and 515 for math (The College Board, 2008b).

Former students had returned to the high school and expressed a concern to the guidance department. A guidance counselor said, “a lot of them come back and they say, well you know, I felt like when I went to school I didn’t get enough work” (Interview 11). The alumni continued and believed that they were not given enough work or challenged enough. When they got to college, they were often overwhelmed (Interview 11).

Some of the students who were interviewed at Rosa Parks High School were afraid to attend college simply because they were afraid to fail (Focus Group 7). They were not sure of the expectations and requirements held by colleges and this caused concern for the students. One student said, “A lot of kids don’t want to go to college is because they hear a lot of stories about how college is a lot of work and it is hard so that scares a lot of students away” (Focus Group 5). Kirst and Venezia (2004) reference this same information when they noted, “The lack of academic preparation highlights the need for better alignment of standards and expectations” (p. 278). If the students were not prepared academically, it would be even more difficult for them to adjust and remain on a college campus.

Carnavale (2005) agreed and stated that both curricula and assessments in the future will need to be worldlier. There was an expected disconnect between academic content and postsecondary education in elementary education. However, once students move into high school, “basic academic preparation begins to collide with more autonomous adult roles, more advanced learning, and initial career preparation” (p 23). If
the students at the high school were not getting this rigorous education their success in postsecondary education would be limited.

The cultural and social capital elements were apparent in the expectations held by the administration and teachers. Horvat (1996) described Cookson and Persell and Laureau’s definition of social and cultural capital as “as institutionalize i.e., widely shared, high status, cultural signals used for social exclusion” (p. 9). This was seen throughout the disconnect in academic expectations held within the school. There were multiple examples of how the administrators and teacher limited the cultural and social capital of the students.

A few students expressed negative comments by teachers regarding the state testing and the students’ continuation onto college. During one of the focus groups the students expressed that some teachers told the students they would not pass the state exam. “They all smart and they tell us we are going to fail” (Focus Group 7). Other students concurred with that student and continued by saying, “Or say you gonna pass language arts, they will say none of y’all are going to pass math” (Focus Group 7). Another student felt that the majority of the teachers did not care and felt that teachers were simply in the school to get paid (Focus Group 5). However, past research explains that teachers are very significant in the college decision process for students. In fact, Hossler, Schmitt and Vesper (1999) stated that, teachers’ encouragement and counselors’ attitudes are important aspects of the college decision process.

Another student explained how the administration had low expectations of them. A Spanish teacher was attempting to take students to Spain on an enrichment trip. However, the administration would not allow the trip to occur. The teachered explain to
the students that the administration had said that the teacher the trip, “wasn’t going to happen and you’re setting your standards too high” (Focus Group 4). This low expectation forces a culture of low achievement.

Phelan, Davidson, and Yu (1998) would consider this a structural border. Their framework focuses on the varying expectations held between the staff and students at the school. This border impedes students’ abilities to make connections with teachers and curriculum throughout their schooling experience (Phelan, Davidson & Yu, 1998). The students in the school are constantly encountering these borders and having to find ways to cope with them.

Bourdieu’s (1977) habitus was also exemplified throughout the school culture. The term habitus refers to the internalized expectations, views, tenets and attitudes of a particular social group (Horvat, 1996; Lareau & Horvat, 1999; McDonough, 1997). The habitus supports and determines how the school functions. In this matter, the lack of expectations, the low academic standards and the lack of guidance provide for a culture unsupportive of college-bound students. The guidance department created a norm by the lack of college discussion and application assistance. In conjunction, the guidance counselors were unaware of the scholarships available to the students and often relied on the head of guidance to discuss these possibilities with the appropriate students.

The teachers continued this low achieving habitus by not educating their students appropriately about college behaviors and expectations. Some teachers focused on the state test and the SAT, but many of the teachers felt that it was the guidance department and parents responsibility to educate the students about college.
The administrators showed little involvement in the college process for the students. They had low expectations for the students (as seen in the trip to Spain) and were unmotivated to have a college fair for the students (Focus Group 4). This lack of expectation created a culture in the school that denied access to information for students interested in attending college.

While there has been significant research in the past on financial concerns, many of the students were not as concerned about this factor. According to Oliverez and Tierney (2005), the type of information that students got about financing college was dependent upon the guidance department and the ability to reach a large number of students to distribute appropriate information. The students interviewed were aware that it was important, but seemed to have little information about specific costs or financial aid programs.

Students were concerned about the cost of college. “I am afraid because there is a lot you have to worry about like making payments” (Focus Group 4). A second student was concerned because, “It was a lot of money and then you got to pay it back and it’s going to be hard if you don’t go through with what you thought you were going to do” (Focus Group 4). The students did not elaborate on these elements and when asked about other financial opportunities they seemed to have little knowledge.

Students were unaware of the possibilities of scholarships, grants, and loans. Students understood that scholarships were a way to pay for college, but were unsure of how to get a scholarship or what scholarships were available. One student said that he/she was most scared about the “Financial aid part and getting scholarships to the college you
want (Focus Group 8). When researchers asked students if they were aware of scholarship opportunities, the majority of students were uncertain.

During the college fair students completed feedback forms. On nineteen of the 145 questionnaires, students wrote that they learned about some form of financing for college. Nineteen other students wanted more information about how to pay for college. If more than a quarter of the juniors surveyed were unaware of financing, it would behoove the guidance department to be more vigilant of educating those students about financial opportunities.

This need for college guidance was also expressed by Tierney and Venegas (2004) when they stated, “The continued lack of participation in higher education for underrepresented groups is due to inadequate academic and socio-cultural preparation, coupled with a lack of understanding about how to pay for college” (p. 2). The lack of knowledge on all levels limits the opportunities for the students.

Regarding family support, there were some similarities and some differences. Hossler, Schmit and Vesper (1999), did find a connection between students attending college and parental encouragement. The students interviewed, did in fact have family members or community members who supported them. Students often identified others who inspired them to succeed.

However, Carnevale and Rose (2003) claimed that, “Low educational expectations are especially prevalent in the lowest SES quartile of families…these expectations affect the likelihood that students will take the necessary steps to attend a top-tier, highly selective college as well as performance on college entrance exams” (p.33). Contradictory to Carnevale and Rose, many of the students in the urban, low
socioeconomic Rosa Parks High School were actually influenced by the family members. One student said, "My family supports me so they have been raising money...I look it from my family, a lot of people didn’t make it to college and I want to be the one to start the generation cause me and my sisters are left of the generation" (Focus Group 5). Another student told researchers that parents, siblings and uncles have all played a role in their high school careers. Many of the students reference that these individuals help to guide them or influence their college decision-making process.

While some of the student did not have the assistance available from their parents or family members, the family members still supported the idea of the students attending college. One student described her family situation well. "Some of us don’t have that (family guidance). Our parents are busy paying the bills and don’t go to PTA meetings, some are drug users, etc. They don’t have time to discuss college so things like this help us" (Focus Group 8). The students who do have the family support felt that it was an important part of their choice. The students who were not privy to that support, relied on the school to assist them in their college search.

Findings Differing From the Prior Research

There were varying results between this study and studies of the past. One of the major elements in college going students was the predisposition aspect that occurred around the 10th grade (Hossler, Schmit & Vesper, 1999). According to Hossler, Schmit & Vesper (1999), students who had this trait, often attended college. However, in this study, even though many of the students did have the desire to attend, the majority of the students from the high school did not continue their education into college. Even when
95% of the 11th graders had the desire to attend, the past graduating classes have proven that there is a drop in desire. Upon graduation in 2007, only a 53% of the students having that same desire to attend college (State of New Jersey Department of Education, 2007).

The major difference between this study and the research of the past is the aspect of predisposition. According to McDonough (1997) clear college goals are obtained between the 8th and the 10th grade. McDonough (1997) also referenced that first-generation college students tended to think about college at a later age than students who had parents who attended college. However, this age difference was not identified at Rosa Parks High School. Out of the 60 writing prompts completed by 10th graders, 55 of the students identified specific interest in college. In fact, 21 provided specific schools that they were interested in attending. Additionally, many of the students explained to researchers that they had been thinking of college for many years.

Hossler, Schmit and Vesper continued this thought and noted, “education aspirations of students are most likely to succeed if they take place by the eighth or ninth grade. Beginning interventions that early does not ensure that students will go to college but is likely to keep college as a viable option in the minds of students and cause them to consider more carefully the courses they take in high school and the information they gather related to their postsecondary plans” (p. 23). This was also a differing element. While many of the students had the predisposition to attend college, the students often were not given the appropriate guidance through the school and therefore, did not attend college. The guidance department was so overwhelmed with students that often college guidance is not provided. One guidance counselor stated acknowledged that they needed
more assistance, “They grow up thinking ‘yeah I’m going to college, I have to go to college, I want to go to college’, but they don’t know how” (Interview 10).

This study also varied from Ogbu’s theory of “acting White.” According to Ogbu (1990), African American students did not transition into college because they did not identify with the behaviors of their White American peers. The premise of Ogbu’s theory was that, due to years of oppression by White society, African American students did not wish to associate themselves with “White” behaviors and for this reason, avoided adopting academic attitude similar to White Americans. Studying for exams, taking challenging courses, speaking properly, and completing homework were behaviors that the middle class White students participated in and therefore, the African American students did not wish to follow suit (Ogbu, 2004). This lack of academic initiative was part of the reasons that students did not continue into higher education. This study intends to examine if Ogbu’s theory exists in Rosa Parks High School and whether the reason the students were not attending college was due to their fear of acting White.

The findings of this study differ from Ogbu’s theory. The results prove that students did, in fact, display predisposition behaviors and college-going interest. The students acknowledged their goals and some students even specified specific steps they needed in order to gain access into college. While the students did identify attending colleges that remained relatively consistent with their social and cultural capital, they were intent on going on to college.

Another difference that occurred from the research was the disconnect between the departments in the school. The researchers in the past acknowledged that the schools needed additional support, however the researchers failed to mention the need for
communication between the various departments in a school (McDonough, 1997). An example of this disconnect at Rosa Parks High School was evident in an interview with the vice principal. When asked about college and scholarship information, the vice principal said, "The guidance counselor is the go-to person when it comes to wanting to go to college" (Interview 3). The teachers concurred and said, "I think most teachers think it’s the guidance counselors’ responsibility and leave it at that" (Interview 1).

The guidance counselor however said that the interest must come from the student. He mentioned, "Normally the expectations about going to college come from the student. The students are self-motivated either from home, sports activities, church, etc. and have the desire to go to college" (Interview 8). While the student must be interested in attending college, the guidance department must motivate the student to continue through the college process. "Although the majority of students wanted to attend college after high school, they confessed that they have a certain level of apathy about the college preparation process" (Kirst & Venezia, 2004). Without the support of the guidance department, the students may have trouble transitioning into higher education.

When it came to scholarships, the guidance counselor even said, "Scholarships are usually given to by the director of guidance, She handles all the scholarships, then she sometimes gives certain scholarships out to us to give" (Interview 11). Later, the counselor said that the guidance staff had little to do with scholarships and there was little information given to them about these opportunities (Interview 11). It was evident that the dissemination of information was lacking simply because communication between the staff was not prevalent.
Past literature (McDonough, 1997; Hossler, Schmit & Vesper, 1999; Kirst and Venezia 2004) stated that with the large, overwhelming responsibilities that are required of guidance departments, there is little time for adequate college counseling. However without the counseling it, students are left without adequate guidance especially when it comes to transition issues (Kirst & Venezia, 2004 p.). Without a cohesive relationship between all departments in the school, students are the ones who will suffer.

The expectations held by the staff did not emphasize a college going culture. It was evident that staff members and students had to have the same expectations and knowledge in order to create an interest and knowledge about college. Lastly, while there were guidance counselors, little counseling was occurring related to college. Past researchers identified guidance as a necessary component, however, alone, it is evident that it is not enough (McDonough, 1997). All of these elements are necessary to review when looking at the major reasons of why students do not go onto higher education in urban neighborhoods.

The students had seen their counselors only a few times and had little knowledge about college. As one student said, “They don’t guide us. They help us with our schedules” (Focus Group 4). Of the 44 students interviewed in focus groups only 9 of the students specifically expressed working with their guidance counselors on college information. The students were the ones suffering. Everyone thought that everyone else was responsible to provide the students with the information regarding college. As one teacher put it, “I think all of the factors have to do with it. You know, the superintendent calls the principal and says ‘what’s going on; the sores are low.’ The principal says ‘that’s not my fault; it is the administrators. I told them to tell the teachers what to do’,
and the mothers say 'no it’s the fathers’ and the father says 'I don’t even know if that kid is mine’ and the kid says ‘it is the community; I can’t get to school on time- so everybody blames everybody’ (Interview 1). More streamlining needs to occur in the school. Each staff member and teacher should have an expectation to education students on college. This furthered education would ensure that students and staff members know who to seek out for assistance regarding interests related to higher education.

Past research suggests creating a K-12 or a K-16 pipeline that will allow students to transition into college with ease (Kirst & Venezia, 2004; McDonough, 2004; Timpane & Haupman, 2004). The university resources help high school communities to improve instruction, promote college going activities, and create policies in the school to increase college attendance for the lower socioeconomic status students (Timpane & Haupman, 2004). Perhaps with additional supports and expectations, the secondary education system can include counselors, teachers, and administrators in the process of preparing students for college.

Limitations

The major limitation of this study was that it was conducted in one school on the east coast. While it was an urban district with significant socio-economic and structural concerns, it was still one school. Further research could be done in alternate locations.

Additionally, due to the absenteeism on the day of the college fair and the inability for certain students to enter the fair, it is possible that the students who were more interested in attending college, were at school that particular day and therefore were
a part of the focus group. There were still a large number of students missing from the total sample size.

Recommendations

The School

Two counselors hired solely for college guidance. In order to fully do their jobs, the guidance counselors need more assistance. Having 300 students per case-load is not a viable solution for students. According to McDonough (1997), “better counselor-to-student ration could offer modest help to college-bound students who lack from the family resources” (p. 157). Considering that students are often first-generation college students, the counselors will have to spend much more time with the students. For this reason it would be beneficial to either add more counselors or to have two counselors who are solely responsible for college application process and scholarship opportunities.

Curriculum changes in the classroom. While counselors can be considered a resource for the students, it is also necessary for college guidance to be infused throughout the curriculum within the school. While counselors can only seen a handful of students a day, if the material is covered within the curriculum of various classes, students will have more exposure to college knowledge and the college process.

One way to access large amounts of students is for guidance counselors to make presentations in the classrooms. Presentations could be made in English classrooms. Since all students are required to take English it will guarantee that all students have an opportunity to hear the presentations. Counselors should begin making these
presentations in 11th grade (Oliverez & Tierney, 2005). Students should hear about college admittance expectations and scholarship information. Many of the scholarship opportunities have deadlines prior to when college applications are due, so it is necessary for students to research and apply for scholarships early in their senior year (Oliverez & Tierney, 2005).

Another suggestion would be to incorporate the college application process within the curriculum. English and math teachers could do SAT prep assignments. Additionally, English teachers could work with students on their personal statements and essays. One guidance counselor agreed with this idea.

"The whole application students are just doing it. I guess it needs to be across the board, but not from, not from just a senior standpoint it needed to be started in sophomore that do a personal statement. By that time they worked on a personal statement sophomore, junior, senior year they should have had it perfected. So if you's started earlier with the personal statement as part of built it into the class it would dissolve some of the problems” (Interview 11).

While one of the English teachers does work with the students, it needs to be a formatted curriculum requirement for all teachers and all students.

For math classes, the curriculum could focus on the cost and financial aspects of college. Teachers could create projects that allow students to compare schools and ask the students to create a budget for their two or four years in college. The math program could also work with scholarships and financial aid concerns. Another suggestion for math classes would be to have students analyze the expected income with a college
degree and without a college degree. This might motivate some of the students to continue onto higher education.

The technology teachers can focus on finding colleges that match students’ expectations and needs. For example, using various websites such as The College Board, students can analyze the expectations that the college have and see if the students would be good candidates for the particular schools.

The history department can focus on various colleges and their evolution throughout the past century. The differences between Ivy league, traditionally African American college, and public versus private schools could all be explored within this curriculum. This knowledge could interest students and motivate them even more to attend.

If the college knowledge is going to be infused throughout the curriculum, it is necessary for districts to acknowledge the need for professional development within this area. Teachers need to be trained in how to teach students about college expectations and financial aid concerns. It would behoove the districts to educate the teaching staff more appropriately regarding what colleges expect. Professional development will allow teachers to assist students who have the interest in attending college. Kirst and Venezia (2004) stated that many students attempt to access teachers to discuss college plans. However, teachers are often removed from the college expectations and requirements. Teachers do not have the training or materials they need to provide students with accurate, up-to-date information. The more people that are available for students to learn about college, the more comfortable the students will feel to ask for assistance.
Students’ Desires to Attend Higher Education

Also, a college fair would be a way to influence large amounts of students. Rosa Parks High School does not have an annual college fair. However, after the researcher created one, students were very interested and identified the fair many times throughout the focus groups. The fair was held during the day so that students could attend without having to venture the streets in the evening. Students expressed great interest and felt that the fair was helpful.

For financial aid assistance, the guidance department could offer a FAFSA workshop either during the day or at night (Oliverez & Tierney, 2005). One should be offered in November or December to familiarize students and families with the forms. Another should be offered in January or February when applications are due to colleges (Oliverez & Tierney, 2005). One of the guidance counselors agreed with this need. “We do have someone that comes in for FAFSA but she doesn’t come in regularly so it’s like once a month for all these students so they’re assigned a computer lab…” (Interview 9). There needs to be consistency within the school so that the students know when and where information is available to them.

Responsibility of the student and Families. Many of the guidance counselors commented that they had to make sure students were prepared to graduate. College was a secondary factor. Students also were not given control over their schedules. They could not pick their courses and electives. By giving students ownership over their courses and having students keep track of their own course history, it not only lessens the burden on the guidance counselor, but also puts responsibility with the student.
Students should have resources that they are required to research. Perhaps students could complete aspects of their application as part of the course requirements. This would give the students incentive to complete the work for both a grade and for their future.

Family members need to take responsibility for their students and attend the workshops and information sessions given by both the high schools and colleges. In order to assist their children in the future, parents and guardians should understand the expectations, both academically and financial, that the student will be responsible for in the future.

_Future Research_

Additional research could focus on a school that focuses on a K-16 pipeline. It would be informative to determine if the transitions between the school junctures is smoother than in this particular situation.

Another suggestion would be to complete case studies of African American students who were academically similar and regarded as having a low socioeconomic status. One group of students could be attending college and the other group entering the workforce. It would be beneficial to follow the students from their senior year into their first year of college to determine what aspects of their high school was their main concerns and obstacles when entering both of those areas.

Education assists students who have a desire to increase on a socioeconomic level. However, the schools, due to lack of staffing, cohesion and resources are unable to
handle the needs of the students. This not only puts the students at a disadvantage but also does not allow them to reach the potential they otherwise might with the right guidance.
References
Students’ Desires to Attend Higher Education


Bloom, J. (2007). (Mis)reading social class in the journey towards college: Youth development in urban America. Teachers College Record, 109, 343-368.


Oakes, J., Rogers, J., Lipton, M., & Morrell, E. (2000). The social construction of college access: Confronting the technical, cultural, and political barrier to low income students of color. In extending our reach: Strategies for increasing access to college (pp. 2-25). Los Angeles: Institute for Democracy, Education, and Access, UCLA.


Appendix A

Focus Group Interview Questions
The following are the interview questions asked to the focus groups:

There are two sections: The first has to do with RPHS and the students' plans after high school. The second has to do RPHS courses and departments that influence students' decision.

College Planning Questions:
1. What is it like being an 11th grader here at Rosa Parks High School?
2. What do you see yourself doing after Rosa Parks High School?
   If it is college: where are you in the process of the college process?
   If not: What do you see yourself doing (long term dreams/goals)?
3. How realistic is this plan?
4. Have you always felt like you wanted to go to college?
   If so, when do you remember knowing that you wanted to go to college?
   If not, when did you realize that college was not for you?
5. Does your family support you in your decision?
6. Is your decision unique to you or are your friends planning on doing after Rosa Parks High School?
   How do your friends feel about you going on to college or going into the workforce?
   How do other adults feel about your plan?
7. What are you most excited about in going to college?
8. What concerns do you have about going on to college?
9. If college is in your future plans, are you concerned about the money needed for college?

Rosa Parks High School Classes Questions:
10. What classes are you taking currently here at Rosa Parks High School and which are you favorite/least favorite?
11. Are there particular teachers/classes that have influenced you while you have been at Rosa Parks High School?

12. What is your opinion of school in general?

13. What other activities or programs are you involved with in the school or in your community (i.e. sports, church, dance)?

14. According to the administration, there are a lot of opportunities provided for you here at the high school (i.e. free SAT’s, college readiness programs, SAT courses, free college applications, college-to-career programs).

   Did you know about these programs and if so how?
   If not, why do you think you never heard about them?

15. What specifically do you do in your classes related to college or life after high school?

16. What is your opinion of guidance at Rosa Parks High School?

17. How often do you meet with your guidance counselor? Do you think this influences your choices regarding school?

18. Whom do you feel most comfortable with at school when discussing college or career plans? How did you gain this comfort?
Appendix B

Guidance Interview Questions
The interview questions focused more on the expectations and limitations that face the staff at Rosa Parks High School.

The following are the questions asked to the guidance staff at Rosa Parks High School:

1. How many years have you been a guidance counselor?
2. How many years have you been at Rosa Parks High School?
3. What does your caseload look like (number of students, types of students, etc)?
4. What does your typical day look like? How much time do you have for college counseling?
5. What are the variables that impede upon your ability to accomplish your job?
6. What do you have to do in order to keep students on their scheduled trajectory to graduate (certification of senior)?
7. How is information about college and graduation disseminated throughout the guidance department? To the students?
8. What are the biggest challenges that students face when applying to college? What answer do you think the students would provide for this question?
9. What additional resources do you need to do your job better?
10. Who do students go to gain college knowledge?
11. Is there curriculum/discussion outside of the guidance department to facilitate this college knowledge?
12. What is the expectation of the following people in relation to college attendance and graduation?
13. Does the 9th grade prepare them academically and socially for the main building? What are the adjustment issues?
Appendix C
Administration Interview Questions
The following questions are for the administration at Rosa Parks High Schools

1. Can you discuss the typical curriculum for students?

2. What information are students provided about college? Is it in the curriculum?

3. Who is in charge of helping students work on their college endeavors?

4. What percentage of students take the SAT and do you have an estimated figure for an average score?

5. What aspects of Rosa Parks High School help you transition students into a college setting? What hinders you most in transferring students into college?

6. How many students are provided with scholarships to local colleges and universities?

7. If I were to ask students about their views on college, what do you think they would say?

8. How has the leadership in the school changed? How does that influence the culture, academics, and interest in pursuing additional education?

9. Describe your guidance department? How are students acquainted with the department and how often do they have the opportunity to see their counselor?

10. Do you think it would be possible to increase the number of students attending college? How?
Appendix D

Journal Prompt
What are your career and/or college goals and aspirations? What steps do you need to complete to get to those goals and aspirations? Explain in detail.
Appendix E

The College Fair Survey
The College Fair Survey

GRADE (please circle one): 10 11 12 GENDER: FEMALE MALE

(1) If I had to decide today, I would pursue a career in: ____________________________

(2) I plan to attend college (choose one): ☐ YES ☐ NO
   If YES—why? ________________________________
   If NO—why not? ________________________________

(3) After high school, I intend to (choose any that apply):
   ☐ attend college full-time ☐ attend college part-time ☐ take a break from school
   ☐ join the military ☐ start a career that does not require a college degree
   ☐ other ______________________________________

(4) One thing I learned at the college fair today ________________________________

(5) After visiting the college fair,

I know more about college admissions TRUE FALSE
I know more about the cost of college TRUE FALSE
I know more about how to pay for college TRUE FALSE
I know more about career options TRUE FALSE

(6) I need more information about: __________________________________________

(7) Additional Comments: ________________________________________________