SOCIAL JUSTICE INFORMED SCHOOL COUNSELING: A CONCEPTUAL MODEL FOR PROMOTING ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT AND EQUITY AMONG DUAL-ENROLLED AFRICAN AMERICAN STUDENTS

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Submitted to the School of Education

Duquesne University

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the Doctor of Philosophy

By  
Sylvester C. Hanner  

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SOCIAL JUSTICE INFORMED SCHOOL COUNSELING:
A CONCEPTUAL MODEL FOR PROMOTING ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT AND EQUITY AMONG DUAL-ENROLLED AFRICAN AMERICAN STUDENTS

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In the United States, obtaining a college degree is a crucial strategy for reducing poverty and closing wealth inequalities between People of Color and Whites. As a strategy to promote college enrollment, high schools may offer students the opportunity to participate in dual enrollment programs. Dual enrollment is a college readiness program that helps high school students to enroll in advanced courses and potentially earn college credit while concurrently enrolled in high school (Edwards, 2011). Students who gain college credit while earning a high school diploma may be more likely to graduate college on time and at a lower cost (College Board, 2017). Despite the benefits of dual enrollment, African American students lack equitable access to dual enrollment programs. Additionally, when they are afforded access to participate in dual enrollment courses, they have a lower academic success rate when compared to White students (CCRC Fink, 2017).
This study provides insight into concepts related to African American students’ opinions, experiences, and preferences regarding their dual enrollment by exploring the perceived experience of dually enrolled African American Students who participated in the social-justice informed school counseling group intervention at Pittsburgh Westinghouse. The focus of this study is to generate a substantive theory of social-justice informed school counseling that promotes African American student success in dual enrollment programs and provides educators valuable insight they can use to promote equity and academic achievement in dual-enrolled African American students.

The data analysis indicated six categories, including Reconceptualizing dual enrollment, Factors supporting dual enrollment, Risk undermining dual enrollment, the Significance of social justice informed group intervention, Needs for improvement of social justice informed group intervention, and Outcome of social justice informed group intervention. The data also indicates that racial oppression and systematic barriers in schools may prevent and discourage African American students from participating in dual enrollment programs or achieving academic success. The final model emerged from the data, suggesting that school counselors can promote equity and academic success of dually enrolled African American students by implementing social-justice informed school counseling programs.

**Keywords:** Achievement Gap; College Readiness; Dual Enrollment; Equity; Social Justice Advocacy
DEDICATION

"With great power comes great responsibility." -Uncle Ben, Spider-Man 1962

To the Pittsburgh Westinghouse Class of 2021. This research would not have been possible without YOU! In the role of your school counselor for five years, we laughed together, we cried together, and most importantly, we learned together. Thank you for putting your trust in me. You often thanked me for pouring into you, but in reality, our relationship was a two-way street in which I learned just as much from you. The parallel process we shared helped us both defy barriers, establish systematic change, and reach our OWN personal definitions of success. It was a blessing to watch you grow from kids on the school yard to racial and social justice advocates. I cannot wait to see what the future holds for you.
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to complete my research. You were the first person I could relate to about research on school counselors and racial equity for African American students. You challenged me to dig deeper in the research, identify gaps, and create interventions that can promote systemic change.

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# TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT .................................................................................................................. iv
DEDICATION ........................................................................................................ vii
ACKNOWLEDGEMENT .......................................................................................... vii
CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION ................................................................................. 1
   Context and Background ....................................................................................... 1
   Statement of the Problem ................................................................................... 3
   Purpose of the Study ........................................................................................... 9
   Research Questions ............................................................................................ 9
   Significance of the Study .................................................................................... 10
   Theoretical Framework of the Study ................................................................ 11
   Definition of Key Terms .................................................................................... 13
   Organization of the Dissertation ....................................................................... 13
CHAPTER II: LITERATURE REVIEW ..................................................................... 15
   Dual Enrollment: Definition and Prevalence ..................................................... 15
   Achievement Gap and Disparities in African American Students’ College Readiness ........ 24
   Social justice Approach to School Counseling .............................................. 37
   Chapter Summary ............................................................................................. 42
CHAPTER III: METHODS ....................................................................................... 43
   Rational for Qualitative Research Approach ................................................... 44
   Research Design ............................................................................................... 45
   Study Population and Sampling Approach .................................................... 46
Framework for Sustaining Equity and Academic Success for Dual Enrollment African American Students........................................................................................................... 109
Social Justice Informed School Counseling Program Outcome................................. 114
Suggestions for Future Research.................................................................................. 115
Suggestions for Practice and School Counselors....................................................... 115
Implications for School Districts.................................................................................. 117
Contribution to the Professional Literature.................................................................. 118
References................................................................................................................... 121
APPENDIX A............................................................................................................. 132
APPENDIX B............................................................................................................. 133
APPENDIX C............................................................................................................. 138
CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

Context and Background

In the United States, obtaining a college degree is a crucial strategy for reducing poverty and closing wealth inequalities between People of Color and Whites. As a strategy to promote college enrollment, there is an expectation for high schools to offer advanced courses that will allow high school students to earn college credits before graduating and transitioning into a post-secondary institution. Dual enrollment is a college readiness program that helps high school students to enroll in advanced courses and potentially earn college credit while concurrently enrolled in high school (Edwards, 2011). Upon completing dual-enrollment courses, high school students may earn high school credits and college credits that appear on a post-secondary transcript (An and Taylor, 2019). Students who gain college credit while earning a high school diploma may be more likely to graduate college on time and at a lower cost (College Board, 2017).

Recognizing the importance of getting a head start on college preparation, many states, districts, and schools have implemented programs that provide high school students with college credit (College Board, 2017). These programs serve millions of students each year, ranging from early professional and technical education to Advanced Placement Programs and various dual enrollment models (College Board, 2017). As a result, dual enrollment has seen a considerable increase in participation due to its potential benefits (Edwards, 2011). For example, according to the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board, about 28,000 high school students enrolled in dual enrollment courses at a Texas community college in 2002, accounting for nearly 5% of total community college enrollments that year (Miller, 2017). By autumn 2016, the number had risen
to over 140,000, accounting for approximately 20% of the state's fall community college enrollments (Miller, 2017).

Despite the national increase in participation, African American students lack equitable access to dual enrollment programs. Additionally, when they are afforded access to participate in dual enrollment courses, they have a lower academic success rate when compared to White students (CCRC Fink, 2017).

Dual enrollment programs often offer these courses to students for free, which can relieve financial burdens placed on students. Since obtaining a college degree is now essential for students to be competitive in today’s workforce (Fitzpatrick & Costantini, 2012), African American students must take advantage of all early college in high school opportunities.

School counselors play a vital role in reducing the achievement gap through a comprehensive school counseling program. Comprehensive school counseling programs are driven by student data and based on academic, career, and personal/social development standards, promoting and enhancing the learning process for all students (ASCA, 2019). As gatekeepers of college in high school opportunities (American School Counselor Association [ASCA], 2012; Ndura, Robinson, & Ochs, 2003; Ohrt, Lambie, & Ieva, 2009), school counselors must be intentional about developing interventions to support the college and career readiness of all underrepresented students.

The American School Counselor Association National Model was developed as a tool for school counselors to unify the profession and to ensure that students receive equitable access to comprehensive, developmental, and preventive school counseling programming through the delivery of school counseling curriculum and services (ASCA: 2003, 2005, 2012). School counselors not only work to improve the personal/ social, academic, and career aspects of
students’ lives but are also charged with challenging system procedures and policies that are barriers to student success (ASCA, 2012). Unfortunately, although the school counselors are responsible for providing equitable services and challenging systematic obstacles, they have perpetuated the same injustices they are responsible for fixing.

For years, school counselors have been blamed for perpetuating educational inequalities by supporting tracking systems and denying students opportunities to remain or move forward on advanced tracks (Holcomb-McCoy-2007, Ford, Grantham, & Whiting, 2008; Henfield, Moore, & Wood, 2008; Moore, Ford, & Milner, 2005). Furthermore, a lack of encouragement from adults and peers contribute to African American students’ low participation rates (Henfield et al., 2008; Saunders & Maloney, 2005; Whiting, 2006).

This research provides a more detailed picture of what African American students face when it comes to equity and academic achievement in dual enrollment and situating any interventions or strategies school counselors may implement to support students’ success.

**Statement of the Problem**

While dual enrollment is a promising academic indicator of college readiness for all students, African American students are the least likely to participate (Struhl & Vargas, 2012). Nationwide, African American students have the lowest dual enrollment rates among high school students (Struhl & Vargas, 2012). In 2019, the Department of Education published a report based on data from the High School Longitudinal Study of 2009 (HSLS:09) conducted by the U.S. National Center for Education Statistics to measure dual enrollment participation and characteristics. Results found that 38% of White students took a college class for credit, compared to 27% of Black students, the lowest amongst all races (U.S. Department of Education, NCES, 2019). In addition, in 2011, 18% of low-income students participated in dual-credit
programs, compared to 27% of wealthier students. By 2015, that gap grew one percentage point, with a 13 percent enrollment rate for low-income students and 23% for more affluent students (U.S. Department of Education, NCES, 2019). Therefore, the opportunities are not equitable among race or class.

Not only are African American students the least likely to participate in dual enrollment, but they have a lower academic success rate when compared to White students. In addition to lower participation in dual enrollment, African American students have lower academic success rates than White students. The Community College Research Center at Columbia University’s Teachers College and the National Student Clearinghouse Research Center takes a state-by-state look at how students who take community college courses while still in high school fare after they transition to college (CCRC Fink, 2017). They looked at almost 200,000 high school students who were dual enrolled in a community college in 2010 and followed them until 2016. According to the study, there was a degree completion gap for low-income students. The survey identified ten-percentage-point or greater differences in completion rates between low- and high-income students who enrolled in community college after high school in 13 states. (CCRC Fink, 2017).

The missed opportunity for African American students to participate in advanced course studies such as dual enrollment can be detrimental in the long run. A considerably more significant number of jobs will require a post-secondary credential as the labor market changes and the economy becomes more worldwide. Experts predict that almost 90% of the fastest-growing jobs of the future will require some post-secondary education and training with expertise in technologies (U.S. Department of Labor, 2007).
Dual enrollment programs are often free, which can relieve financial burdens placed on students. As a result, high school graduation no longer assures stable employment and a decent income; a college degree is becoming increasingly necessary to secure financially secure professional options (Donohue & Heckman, 1991). In addition, low educational achievement is associated with high unemployment, lower earnings, higher crime, and greater dependency on welfare and other social services (Holcomb-McCoy, 2007). Couturier and Cunningham (2006) noted that earning a college degree includes higher wages, employment benefits, and a better life (Parikh, 2013). Conversely, African American males who do not earn a college degree are likely to earn lower wages, have little or no employment benefits, and have a more challenging life even if they graduate from high school.

There is undoubtedly a correlation between socioeconomic status and school outcomes, race, social class, and school performance recognized by research that analyzed the achievement gap across racial groups (Rothstein, 2004). The low academic achievement of African American students is often attributed to environmental and cultural differences that impact school performance (Stewart, 2007). School systems in low-SES communities are often under-resourced, negatively affecting students' academic progress and outcomes (Aikens & Barbarin, 2008). While professional literature demonstrates a significant achievement gap between African American students and their White counterparts, contemporary researchers often consider discriminatory barriers that hinder successful outcomes (Byrd, 2017; Milner, 2010; Wright et al., 2017).

Historically, scholarship examining racial disparities in education was often grounded in deficit ideologies (Valencia, 2015). These ideologies are defined as the “negative, stereotypical, and prejudicial beliefs one holds about diverse groups” (Allen et al., 2013, p.122). A deficit-
based approach has profound implications as it hinders educational stakeholders from acknowledging diverse students’ strengths and can influence the development of large-scale policies and practices (Sandifer, Gibson, & Brant-Rajahn 2021).

Schools instituted oppressive practices, such as tracking and gatekeeping, further prohibiting African American students from participating in more rigorous coursework (Holcomb-McCoy, 2007). In addition, requiring students to obtain letters of recommendation, and standardized test score requirements, coupled with low expectations and lingering institutional inequities, can be discouraging (Ford, Grantham, & Whiting, 2008; Henfield, Moore, & Wood, 2008; Moore, Ford, & Milner, 2005). Therefore, African American students may choose not to participate in rigorous courses. Low levels of involvement among African American students are due to various factors, including a lack of encouragement from adults and peers. (Henfield et al., 2008; Saunders & Maloney, 2005; Whiting, 2006).

School counselors are often considered the gatekeepers of college readiness opportunities in most school settings. They can detect success and equity gaps, investigate the system that perpetuates the gaps, and collaborate with other educators to assist students in establishing academic identities and personal fulfillment through achievement (Pope-Davis et al., 2003). In addition, with dual enrollment becoming a key focus in college readiness, school counselors are expected to ensure all students have access to dual enrollment and the academic support required to succeed.

School counselors act as advocates, leaders, collaborators, and consultants who create systematic change by providing equitable educational access and success by connecting their school counseling programs to the district’s mission and improvement plan (ASCA, 2019). ASCA encourages school counselors to ensure that students from culturally diverse backgrounds
have access to appropriate services and opportunities that promote maximum development (ASCA, 2004). Professional school counselors make a significant, vital, and indispensable contribution to at-risk students' academic, career, and personal development (ASCA, 2012). By analyzing and interpreting the data gathered through assessments, school counselors can create and develop specific goals that effectively address the holistic needs of students and reflect the mission of the school counseling program and district (ASCA, 2012; Gladding, 2009; Erford, 2011).

School counselors work to improve the personal/ social, academic, and career aspects of students’ lives and are charged with challenging system procedures and policies that are barriers to student success (ASCA, 2012). However, even if school counselors design their programs aligned with the model, additional barriers may need to be removed before underserved students achieve (Holcomb, 2007). Although many school counselors have been trained to look for sources of problems within the individual, among culturally diverse students, the sources of the students’ situation could be the result of external or contextual forces such as racial discrimination, social disadvantage, or poverty (Pope-Davis et al., 2003).

Social Justice Advocacy is a term commonly used to describe actions taken to reduce barriers to success for minority students (Goodman et al., 2018). For example, recent initiatives from the American School Counseling Association (ASCA) call for the equitable treatment of African American students within school counseling programs (2020, 2018). In addition, social justice advocacy entails an ongoing, collaborative approach that must be intentional and proactive (Sandifer et al., 2021).

Social justice recognizes that there are situations in which applying the same rules to unequal groups can generate unequal results. Whereas equal opportunity and human rights apply
to everyone, social justice targets marginalized groups in society and focuses on the disadvantaged (Sandifer et al., 2021). Therefore, school counselors must intentionally create interventions for African American students to close the achievement gap.

While African American students face unique societal challenges that may contribute to these gaps, it is imperative that school-based leaders actively work to remove barriers to student success (Goodman et al., 2018). Social justice approaches to school counseling require school counselors to be equitable in their practices. School counselors must resist using cultural or external factors as excuses for not setting high standards and demanding the most from students. Holcomb-McCoy (2007) suggests that when school counselors include social justice ideals in their profession, they can significantly close the achievement gap.

Currently, no studies give African Americans a voice on what they perceive as protective factors in dual enrollment. Instead, the dominant literature focuses on the achievement gap between African American and White students. There is undoubtedly a correlation between socioeconomic status and school outcomes, race, social class, and school performance, which must be recognized in analyzing the achievement gap across racial groups (Rothstein, 2004). School systems in low-SES communities are often under-resourced, negatively affecting students' academic progress and outcomes (Aikens & Barbarin, 2008). The issues of equity and achievement for dual enrollment for African American students have primarily been viewed from a deficit perspective, focusing on the lack of resources, low socioeconomic status, poverty, and other inequities. This view may suggest that less is known about school counseling interventions to support the academic success of dual-enrolled African American students. Furthermore, social justice-informed frameworks should be at the forefront of new research to
develop models that ensure dual-enrolled African American students' academic success and equity.

**Purpose of the Study**

This study explores the perceived experience of dually enrolled African American Students who participated in the social-justice informed school counseling group intervention at Pittsburgh Westinghouse to generate a substantive theory of social-justice informed school counseling program that promotes African American student success in dual enrollment programs and provide educators valuable insight they can use to promote equity and academic achievement in dual-enrolled African American students.

The issues of equity and achievement for dual enrollment for African American students have primarily been viewed from a deficit perspective, focusing on the lack of resources, low socioeconomic status, poverty, and other inequities. Far too often, research literature that addresses critical issues in the daily lives of ethnic minority students ignores the voices of these students (Fernandez, 2002). Thus, there has not been much research that explicitly allows African American students to voice their attitudes or perceptions on dual enrollment programs.

This data adds to the body of knowledge in the educational study on Persons of Color. In addition, this study allows African American students to gain their voices by telling their educational journey stories during a semi-structured interview.

**Research Questions**

Consistent with the statement of the problem and the purpose of this study, the following research questions were designed to guide the study:

1. What does dual enrollment mean to African American students?
2. What are the risk and protective factors/barriers to the academic experience of dually enrolled African American students?

3. How is a social justice-informed school counseling approach supportive of African American students during dual enrollment?
   a. What aspects of the social justice-informed school counseling approach help support African American students’ dual enrollment?
   b. What aspects of the social justice-informed school counseling approach do students want to change to enhance their experience in dual enrollment?
   c. How does participation in a social justice-informed school counseling program facilitate the success of dually enrolled African American students?

**Significance of the Study**

This study contributes to closing the college readiness and achievement gaps between African American and White students regarding dual enrollment. Over the years, there has been extensive research about how the achievement gap affects poor students of color, yet we rarely provide strategies or interventions to solve the problem. Tillman (2002) argues “that there is a need to consider research frameworks that can help researchers to more fully capture the experiences of African Americans-their struggles as well as their success” (Tillman, 2002, p.3). Additionally, scholars argue that there should be a culturally responsive approach to college readiness for students of color (Welton & Martinez, 2014).

This study produces a working model for dual enrollment programs based on the data gathered from dually enrolled African American students who attend a social-justice informed comprehensive group counseling intervention.
As a grounded-theory study, this study provides insight into concepts related to African American students’ opinions, experiences, and preferences regarding their dual enrollment. Counter-story offers space to conduct and present research grounded in the experiences and knowledge of People of Color. Therefore, this investigation provides African American students who participated in the social justice-informed program while dual-enrolled an opportunity to express their education experience in their own words, countering the deficit ideology. Specifically, this research aids in clarifying several anomalies, such as how African American students see dual enrollment and the comprehensive school counseling program, what African American students see as factors that contribute to or hinder their success in dual enrollment, what aspects of the comprehensive school counseling program is valued by African American students, and how elements of the group intervention and the school counselor’s presence impact African American students. Finally, this research may help disparity researchers and higher administration develop strategies to close the race-based academic achievement gap.

**Theoretical Framework of the Study**

This study relies on two models for the design of its research methodology: The Grounded Theory model and the Counter-Narrative Storytelling model from Critical Race Theory.

**Grounded Theory**

Grounded Theory is a methodological approach in qualitative research that can discover or construct theory from the data, systematically obtained and analyzed using comparative analysis. The approach was developed first by Glaser and Strauss (1967) and later refined by Strauss (1987) and by Corbin and Strauss (2008).
This study defines the social justice-informed school counseling approach following the grounded theory model. It provides a better understanding of strategies used to promote academic success and equity based on the experiences of dually enrolled African American Students perceived experience. Data analysis involves coding the transcribed interviews following the constant comparative approach of grounded theory methodology (Strauss & Corbin, 1997). These codes ground the developing theory in the data and become the theory itself through iterations and abstractions. An audit trail was created to support the credibility of the study.

**Critical Race Theory and Counter-Narrative Storytelling**

In addition to grounded theory, this study utilizes Critical Race theory to understand the racialized experiences of the participants. Critical Race Theory (CRT) is a theoretical framework that researchers use to deconstruct and explore the power dynamic surrounding race, racism, privilege, and oppression that marginalized populations face through socio-political and institutional processes (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017). This theory clarifies and transforms these power dynamics by using different methods and approaches, such as advocacy and confrontation of injustices concerning work towards equity and representation for minority populations (Henfield, 2008). This study uses one of the significant critical race theory tenets called counter-storytelling.

Counter-storytelling is used to magnify underprivileged communities' stories, experiences, narratives, and truths. Under the pretext of "objective" research, social scientists produce stories that reinforce deficit, prejudiced perceptions of People of Color. (Solórzano, D. G., & Yosso, 2002) Counter-storytelling offers space to conduct and present research grounded in the experiences and knowledge of People of Color. Therefore, this investigation provides
African American students who participated in the social justice-informed program while dual-enrolled an opportunity to express their education experience in their own words, countering the deficit ideology.

**Definition of Key Terms**

*Achievement Gap:* A matter of race and class. Across the U.S., a gap in academic achievement persists between minority and disadvantaged students and their white counterparts (National Government Association, 2005)

*College Readiness:* “Students who are considered equipped with the knowledge and skills deemed essential for success in university, college, and community-college programs” (Hidden Curriculum, 2014, p. 1).

*Dual Enrollment:* Dual enrollment allows high school students to enroll in college courses and potentially earn college credit while concurrently enrolled in high school (Edwards, 2011).

*Equity:* In education means “providing students with what they need to succeed, regardless of their racial, ethnic, cultural, or socioeconomic background (Milner, 2015)

*Social Justice Advocacy:* is a term commonly utilized to describe action steps initiated to remove obstacles to success for underrepresented students (Goodman et al., 2018).

**Organization of the Dissertation**

The study is organized into five chapters. Chapter I explores the background of the study that provides an overview of the benefits dual enrollment has toward college readiness while highlighting the inequities African American students face in access and academic achievement in dual enrollment programs. Racial disparities explain the achievement gap between African American and White students. Next, this chapter provides a problem statement to be examined to
demonstrate the need for social justice approaches to school counseling to promote equity and academic achievement for dual-enrolled African American students. Next, the research questions are listed, along with an overview of how the study was conducted. Finally, definitions of the terms used throughout the study are listed. Chapter II examines the relevant literature, including a review of the existing work on social justice school counseling approaches to support dual enrollment African American students, and expands on the study's theoretical framework.

Chapter III includes an overview of the dissertation’s research design, methods, sampling procedures, and the rationale for choosing the methodology. In addition, this chapter provides qualifications, population and sample data, method of gathering data, method of data analysis, triangulation, limitations of the study, and a chapter summary. Chapter IV includes the study's findings from semi-structured interviews and themes developed from the coding analysis. This chapter explains the themes used and presents the final model. Chapter V explores the significant findings and connections to the existing literature. The implications of the results and how these could practically apply in the context of comprehensive school counseling programs are presented in this chapter. The chapter concludes with an explanation of the limitations of the study, implications for further researchers, recommendations for professionals, and the contribution of this study to the literature.
CHAPTER II: LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter presents a comprehensive review of the literature on dual enrollment, the interplay of college readiness, dual enrollment, the racial-based achievement gap, and the comprehensive school counseling programs focusing on African American experiences. The literature is divided into sections to offer readers a broader understanding of the importance of the proposed research topic. Additionally, the researcher discusses the study's theoretical framework, which is the social justice approach and critical race theory.

Dual Enrollment: Definition and Prevalence

Recognizing the importance of getting a head start on college preparation, many states, districts, and schools have implemented programs that provide high school students with college credit. (College Board, 2017). College credit in high school (CCHS) programs offer several different models for students to earn college credit and serve millions of students each year. Specifically, dual enrollment allows high school students to enroll in college courses and potentially earn college credit while concurrently enrolled in high school (Edwards, 2011). Upon completing dual-enrollment courses, high school students may earn high school credits and college credits that appear on a post-secondary transcript (An and Taylor, 2019). Students who obtain college credit while earning a high school diploma may be more likely to graduate college on time and at a lesser cost, depending on the program of study and the institution. (College Board, 2017). The national data collected from 2002-to 2003 shows that 71 percent of public high school students offered courses for dual credit (Waits et al., 2005).

Dual Enrollment Policies

While policies for college credit in high school CCHS programs may have different goals and measurable outcomes depending on the institution, College Board (2017) does identify
themes each program should be accountable for addressing. College Board (2017) recognizes that there has been an increase in college credit in high school CCHS offerings due to increased demand from students, institutions, and state policymakers; there have been concerns about the consistent delivery of rigorous academic coursework, the impact on college success, equal access to benefits for disadvantaged students, and the extent to which families realize college cost savings. For individual policymakers, the rationale for supporting CCHS classes runs similarly. State, K–12, and college leaders see the significant appeal in challenging students academically with postsecondary learning opportunities (College Board 2017). They are focused on increasing college enrollment completion rates and reducing the costs of postsecondary education for families by providing access to free or discounted courses (College Board, 2017). Although dual enrollment programs recommend policies be put in place to promote equal access to benefits for disadvantaged students, African American students may still face barriers to access due to oppressive educational practices.

**Delivery and Academic Integrity in Dual Enrollment**

The delivery of dual enrollment can look different depending on the school or its intuition. Instruction can occur in a high school, college, or online. In addition, dual enrollment courses can be taught to high school students by college-approved high school teachers or by college faculty (College Board, 2017). Consequently, the delivery process of dual enrollment may serve as another barrier to access for African American students. The amount of well-qualified, highly experienced instructors is a substantial disparity between schools that serve high proportions of African American children and those that do not (Flores, 2007). The original intent of dual credit was to provide more challenging curricula to prepare high school students academically. However, African American students are four times more likely than
White students to attend a school with 80% or fewer certified teachers. (U.S. Department of Education, 2014b). Therefore, African American students may not have the opportunity to participate in dual enrollment because there is a likelihood that their teachers may not be certified for a college-level course.

African American students may also face disparities in access and success in dual enrollment if the classes are online or require work to be completed electronically. For example, a study from the American College Testing (ACT, 2015) discovered a significant academic achievement disparity between students who have access to multiple electronic devices at home and those who only have one. The researchers studied the 14 percent of ACT-tested students who stated they only have access to one gadget at home. Eighty-five percent of those students were "underserved," meaning they were low-income, first-generation college students or members of a racial or ethnic minority group. (ACT, 2015). In addition, students with only one electronic device at home face many challenges when completing their schoolwork that does not exist for their peers who have multiple devices (ACT, 2015). For example, students who only have one smartphone face challenges such as sharing that device with other family members, inhibiting their ability to do their homework successfully (ACT, 2015). Jim Larimore, chief officer for ACT’s Center for Equity in Learning, stated that “when we question why we have education inequity, these insights about the digital divide should be kept in mind.” (“The Digital Divide Among High School Students,” 2018).

**Collaborative Efforts to Access Advanced Courses for College Credit**

Collaborative efforts between state colleges, school districts, or philanthropies fund and manage dual enrollment partnerships (College Board, 2017). Through these partnerships, dual enrollment makes it possible for high school students to obtain college credit by taking a
college course. Local education agencies and higher education institutions agree to award college credits after the students pass the course. Whether and how the credit transfers depend on the arrangement of the institution. For example, the Pathways in Technology Early College High School (P-TECH) concept began in New York in 2010 through a partnership of New York, NYC College of Technology, and IBM (P-TECH, 2021). The P-TECH grade 9–14 model focuses on student learning across an integrated six-year sequence of high school classes, college courses, and work-based learning experiences, focusing primarily on English, mathematics, workplace learning, and technical courses. Most of the P-TECH funding comes through the local district. State career and technical education (CTE) funds may also be applied. College faculty participate in the school’s curriculum planning and development and co-teaching, mentoring, and tutoring activities (College Board, 2017). The first cohort of students from the flagship Brooklyn P-TECH school reported an on-time completion rate four times higher than the national average for associate degree students, and over 80% of those students are now pursuing a four-year degree compared to a citywide average of 55% (College Board, 2017).

According to the U.S. Department of Education and Statistics (2014), students will face high expectations in the real world of college and career readiness. Still, our nation’s schools have not consistently set rigorous goals for all students. African American students continue to attend zoned schools based on race and economics (Sandifer et al., 2021). In terms of resources, students in low-income areas often lack access to advanced course coursework. These schools are more likely to have fewer academic resources, educational opportunities, and effective teachers (Taylor & Fry, 2012; Office for Civil Rights, 2016; Palardy, 2015); but more police presence and metal detectors (Toldson, 2012). Researchers have found that schools in culturally
and linguistically diverse or high-poverty areas often offer a less-rigorous curriculum because they cover less material or give less homework, failing to challenge students.

**Dual Enrollment Participation**

As previously mentioned, the increase in dual enrollment opportunities continues to increase due to the expectation of schools to provide college readiness opportunities. Dual enrollment participants grew from 680,000 in the 2002-03 school year to 1.4 million in 2010-11 (College Board, 2017). In the 2015-16 school year, 69 percent of high schools offered dual enrollment opportunities (U.S. Government Accountability Office [GAO], 2018), thereby making dual enrollment the second most popular college readiness program in the United States of America.

While dual enrollment is a promising academic indicator of college readiness for all students, African American students are the least likely to participate. Nationwide, African American students have the lowest dual enrollment rates among high school students (Struhl & Vargas, 2012). In 2019, the Department of Education published a report based on data from the High School Longitudinal Study of 2009 (HSLS:09) conducted by the U.S. National Center for Education Statistics to measure dual enrollment participation and characteristics. Results found that 38% of White students took a college class for credit, compared to 27% of Black students, the lowest amongst all races (U.S. Department of Education, NCES, 2019). In addition, in 2011, 18% of low-income students participated in dual-credit programs, compared to 27% of wealthier students. By 2015, that gap grew one percentage point, with a 13 percent enrollment rate for low-income students and 23 percent for more affluent students (U.S. Department of Education, NCES, 2019).
School administration's selective gatekeeping or prerequisites contribute to the lack of African American student representation in dual enrollment courses. Scholars found that educators are less likely to refer African American students for advanced courses and discourage these students from attempting to enroll in advanced courses (Wright et al., 2017). In 2016, six states included minimum high school GPA as a criterion for admission to a dual enrollment program. Seventeen states require written permission or a recommendation from a teacher or school official. In addition, 25 states require dual enrollment candidates to meet course prerequisites set by the departments or institutions offering dual enrollment programs; and 24 states include other eligibility criteria, such as completion of specific high school courses or passing scores on state-determined high school or post-secondary assessments (Education Commission of the States, 2019). As a result, program participants are overwhelmingly White, high-achieving, female, and not from low-income backgrounds (Education Commission of the States, 2019).

**Academic Success in Dual Enrollment**

African American students are the least likely to participate in dual enrollment. Furthermore, they have lower academic success rates than White students when they participate. The National Student Clearinghouse Research Center and the Community College Research Center at Columbia University's Teachers College examine how students who take community college courses while still in high school do once they start college (CCRC Fink, 2017). They looked at almost 200,000 high school students who were dual enrolled in a community college in 2010 and followed them until 2016. According to the study, there was a degree completion gap for low-income students. The survey identified ten-percentage-point or greater differences in
completion rates between low- and high-income students who enrolled in community college after high school in 13 states. (CCRC Fink, 2017).

**Dual Enrollment Benefits**

Researchers have identified several benefits to early college in high programs, such as dual enrollment. I have categorized them into three theme areas for this research. These three themed areas promote high school graduation rates, college enrollment, and disparity reduction in the achievement gap.

a) **Promote high school graduate rate:** Dual enrollment programs have several benefits that support students' college readiness journey. Dually enrolled students have an easy transition to the college application process. They are better prepared for college coursework and have an easier transition from high school to college (An & Taylor, 2019; Hertberg-Davis, Callahan, & Kyburg, 2006; Klopfenstein & Thomas, 2009; U.S. Department of Education, 2017).

Several studies that have used advanced quantitative methods to estimate the effects of dual enrollment have generally identified positive impacts of dual enrollment participation on a variety of academic outcomes, including high school graduation, college enrollment, college persistence, college GPA, and post-secondary degree completion (Allen & Dadgar, 2012; An, 2013; An & Taylor, 2019; Hemelt, Schwartz, & Dynarski, 2019; Giani et al., 2014; Karp, Calcagno, Hughes, Jeong, & Bailey, 2007; Miller et al., 2018; Speroni, 2011; Swanson, 2008; U.S. Department of Education, 2017). For example, Struhl (2012) studied thousands of Texas students who completed college courses in high school. The study found that students who participate in dual enrollment attend and complete college at much higher rates than students with similar backgrounds.
who did not take college courses in high school. Another study in Florida and New York City also showed a positive relationship between dual enrollment participation and high school graduation and college enrollment (Karp et al., 2007).

b) **Promote college enrollment:** “Never in history has a college degree been more essential and almost necessary to reach fulfillment in an individual’s personal and professional life (Fitzpatrick & Costantini, 2012).” With the changing labor market and a more globalized economy, many jobs require a post-secondary credential. Experts predict that almost 90% of the fastest-growing jobs of the future will require some post-secondary education and training with expertise in technologies (U.S. Department of Labor, 2007). In 2018, Americans with a bachelor’s degree, on average, earned 64% more than those with only a high school diploma (U.S. Department of Education and Statistics, 2018). As a result, high school graduation no longer assures stable employment and a decent income; a college diploma is becoming increasingly necessary to secure financially secure professional options. (Donohue & Heckman, 1991).

Obtaining a college diploma is a critical strategy for reducing poverty and closing wealth inequities between Persons of Color and Whites in the United States. (Tsoi-A, 2015). However, the missed opportunity for African American students to participate in dual enrollment and poor academic achievement can be detrimental over time. In addition, students’ incomes are negatively affected if they do not attend and graduate from college. Couturier and Cunningham (2006) noted that earning a college degree includes higher wages, employment benefits, and a better life (Parikh, 2013, p. 221). Conversely, African American males who do not earn a college degree are likely to earn lower wages, have little or no employment benefits, and have a more challenging life
even if they graduate from high school. Since obtaining a college degree is now essential for students to be competitive in today’s workforce, educational systems need to provide equitable opportunities for African American students to participate in early college in high school programs.

c) **Promote disparity reduction in the achievement gap.** Dual enrollment benefits for high school students are beyond academically advanced students. Some studies show that the dual enrollment program helps low-achieving students meet high academic standards. For example, the Bill and Melinda Gate Foundation’s Early College High School Initiative (ECHS) had great success in enhancing underserved students' college enrollment. ECHS reports show that the vast measure of their students earned at least 30 college credits by the time they graduate high school and outperformed their peers in matched comparison districts on the state assessment in math and English.

Dual enrollment programs often offer these courses to students for free, which can relieve financial burdens placed on students. Researchers have noted that dual enrollment can improve college attendance among underrepresented students by making it affordable. According to (Berger et al., 2012), if underrepresented students believe the incentive of earning college credits with reduced financial burden is valuable, it might increase their participation in additional post-secondary education and credential accumulation after high school. In addition, African American students who go to college often need developmental or remedial courses before taking an actual college-level course to be successful (Tsoi-A, 2015). The academic rigor of dual enrollment may also reduce the need for remedial courses, saving time and money. The missed opportunity for African American students to participate in advanced course studies such as dual
enrollment can be detrimental in the long run. Since obtaining a college degree is now essential for students to be competitive in today’s workforce (Fitzpatrick & Costantini, 2012), African American students must take advantage of all early college in high school opportunities.

**Achievement Gap and Disparities in African American Students’ College Readiness**

Obtaining a college diploma is an integral approach to lowering poverty and bridging wealth disparities in the United States between People of Color and Whites (Tsoi-A, 2015). Moreover, with the changing labor market and a more globalized economy, many jobs require a post-secondary credential. Experts predict that almost 90% of the fastest-growing jobs of the future will require some post-secondary education and training with expertise in technologies (U.S. Department of Labor, 2007). Therefore, college and career readiness must be at the forefront of school reform.

The definition of college-ready for this research is “Students who are considered equipped with the knowledge and skills deemed essential for success in university, college, and community-college programs” (Hidden Curriculum, 2014, p. 1). According to the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES, 2007), there are disparities in post-secondary education. “Specifically, students who are of low socioeconomic status (SES), are African American, or Hispanic tend to be left out of post-secondary options” (NCES). In addition, “Reid and Moore (2008) noted that often first-generation urban college students are at a disadvantage when it comes to post-secondary access due to lack of support from schools, high expectations, and adequate academic preparation” (Parikh, 2013, p. 222). This may suggest that the achievement gap should be viewed more as a lack of opportunity gap.
There is a gap in areas of college enrollment when comparing students of color and their white counterparts. For example, 35.3 percent of Black students enrolled in four-year colleges and universities received a degree, compared to 48.9% of Hispanic males and 60.1 percent of White males; only 19.8% of those enrolled in two-year colleges received a degree, compared to 28.6% of Hispanic and 30.4 percent of white males. (U.S. Department of Education, 2015). This may suggest that high schools are not adequately preparing students of color for college.

The achievement gap describes the extreme disparities between children who live in low-income, impoverished communities, and children who live in affluent, middles-to high-income communities (Holcomb, 2007). According to the National Governors’ Association, the achievement gap is a matter of race and class. Across the U.S., a gap in academic achievement persists between minority and disadvantaged students and their white counterparts. Environmental and cultural variables that affect school performance are sometimes blamed for African American students' lack of academic achievement (Stewart, 2007).

While the disparity between Persons of Color and Whites is well-documented in the literature, shortcomings and inequities in educational systems, particularly those with high minority populations, must also be addressed. (Tsoi-A, 2015). The significant disparity in preparation among racial and ethnic groupings and low-income and first-generation college students is one of the most serious concerns that must be addressed through college and career preparedness reform. For example, African American students are much less likely to be college-ready, with those in high-poverty schools being the least equipped. (ACT, 2013).

Historically, scholarship examining racial disparities in education was often grounded in deficit ideologies (Valencia, 2015). These ideologies are defined as the “negative, stereotypical, and prejudicial beliefs one holds about diverse groups” (Allen et al., 2013, p.122). A deficit-
based approach has profound implications as it hinders educational stakeholders from acknowledging diverse students’ strengths and can influence the development of large-scale policies and practices (Sandifer et al., 2021). Research and data on high school policy and practice disparities elevate an issue often ignored or discounted in education reform discussions.

**Oppressive Practice in School Settings**

Despite long-term advocacy efforts for equality that have resulted in some positive gains, African Americans continue to face significant systemic racial oppression (Sandifer et al., 2021). To remove systemic barriers and address educational inequities, it is essential for those in positions of power to challenge racist and discriminatory practices at all levels courageously. As Critical Race Theory purports, by recognizing that racism exists and is embedded in our systems and institutions, individuals can shed preconceived ideas that suggest racism is only an action displayed by a person or a group of people and accept that it is more complex and ever-changing (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017). Racism is about systems that marginalize People of Color, one major problem facing educational achievement and opportunity across ethnic and socioeconomic groups. Unfortunately, many racist practices plague African American students' college and career readiness (Ladson-Billings, 2006). Although schools are often viewed as institutions that support the growth and development of all students, Allen et al. (2013) maintained that schools are reflections of the larger society.

Specific examples include inequitable resources and racialized tracking. In terms of resources, African American students continue to attend homogenous schools that are zoned based on race and economics (Sandifer et al., 2021). These schools are more likely to have fewer academic resources, educational opportunities, and effective teachers (Taylor & Fry, 2012;
Office for Civil Rights, 2016; Palardy, 2015, as cited in Sandifer et al., 2021); but more police presence and metal detectors (Toldson, 2012).

**Disparities in Rigorous Coursework**

Students require access to high-level courses with excellent instruction to prepare for the rigors of college by expanding their content knowledge and developing higher-order thinking skills. (Tsoi-A, 2015). High school students who have access to college-level academics are more likely to pursue and succeed in higher education (McGee, 2013; Roderick, Coca, & Nagaoka, 2011). The completion of Algebra II has been demonstrated to have a significant impact on a variety of college outcomes (Long, Iatarola, & Conger, 2009; Gaertner, Kim, Des Jardins, & McClarty, 2013). Unfortunately, African American students are often underrepresented even when advanced courses of study are offered at a high school.

Nationally, there is a race gap in high school honors classes. Only 57% of African American students attend schools that offer advanced math and science courses compared to 81% of Asian students and 71% of White students (The United States Department of Education, 2014a). A full complement of courses includes Algebra I, geometry, Algebra II, calculus, biology, chemistry, and physics and are considered necessary to be college-ready (The United States Department of Education, 2014a). Researchers have found that schools in culturally and linguistically diverse or high-poverty areas often offer a less-rigorous curriculum because they cover less material or give less homework, failing to challenge students. While African American students make up 16 percent of the high school population, they only make up 8% of calculus enrollment. (The United States Department of Education, 2014a). This is a problem because research has found that students enrolled in challenging courses such as algebra,
trigonometry, chemistry, and advanced English usually have higher standardized scores, which are needed as prerequisites for college admissions.

Advanced Placement Exams also provide opportunities for students to earn college credit while they are in high school. However, very few African American students are chosen for the A.P. track, and if they are selected for the AP track, fewer pass the AP course exams (Buckley 2017). Only 9% of students pursuing advanced placement courses are African American, and only 4% of students who pass an advanced placement examination are African American. (The United States Department of Education, 2014a). In the Pittsburgh Public Schools, the district enrollment is 54% African American and 33% White, but the AP enrollment is 35% African American and 55% White (Polke, 2014). Similarly, in the Penn Hills School district, enrollment is 60% African American and 34% White, but the AP enrollment is 33% African American and 66% White (Polke, 2014).

When African American students are afforded opportunities to participate in college readiness, such as dual enrollment, they may choose not to participate. Even when they satisfy the minimum academic requirements and have a strong teacher and school counselor recommendations, many African American students opt out of advanced, accelerated, or gifted education programs. (Ford, 1996; Ford, Harris, Tyson, & Trotman, 2002; Moore et al., 2005)

**Disparities in Teaching**

The success of students in high school is dependent on the quality of teaching. Researchers say that high-level instruction in tough courses, high expectations from instructors, and healthy connections with teachers and other school employees are three components of teacher quality that are necessary for students to accomplish at the high school level and be college-ready (Flores, 2007; Reid & Moore, 2008). In addition, evidence suggests that the
quality of teaching is the most important in-school factor affecting student achievement (Thompson, Warren, Foy, & Dickerson, 2008). While low-income children face challenges outside of the classroom, there are countless examples of low-income institutions where students excel academically and take challenging courses. (Tsoi-A, 2015). This demonstrates that culture or racial background does not inherently prevent students' achievement (Moore, Slate, Edmonson, Combs, Bustamante, & Onweugbuzie, 2010). However, many African American students, particularly in low-income areas, attend schools where they may not have access to high-quality teaching.

**Highly Qualified Teachers**

The amount of well-qualified, highly experienced instructors is a substantial disparity between schools that serve high proportions of African American children and those that do not (Flores, 2007). Currently, African American students are four times more likely than White students to attend a school where 80 percent or fewer teachers are certified (U.S. Department of Education, 2014b). Furthermore, 4% of African American students attend a school where more than 20% of teachers are in their first year of teaching, compared to 1% of White students. (United States Department of Education, 2014b). This inequity in quality teachers may result in lower academic achievement.

Many African American high school graduates do not pursue higher education. Those who do enroll in college are frequently placed in remedial classes. Statistics show that students enrolled in remedial classes are far less likely to graduate from college (Strong American Schools, 2008). One method to avoid this is to ensure that low-income schools have more highly qualified teachers. According to research, a teacher's credential status, years of teaching
experience, and educational attainment have statistically significant effects on college students' remediation rates (Guarino, Brown, & Wyse, 2011; Howell, 2011).

**Attracting and Retaining Good Teachers.** Attracting and retaining good teachers in low-income school districts can be difficult. Because the job in these schools is intrinsically more complex, and state accountability mechanisms fail to ensure that schools are meeting standards, schools serving high numbers of low-income minority students have a harder time attracting and retaining outstanding teachers.

Teachers are not compensated if they do not meet expected targets under pay-for-performance programs, making it harder to keep them in these institutions (Guarino, et al., 2011). As a result, teacher turnover is significant; teachers leave underperforming schools searching for more stable posts, resulting in a disparity in teacher qualifications (Clotfelter et al., 2005). Because the equal distribution of the finest teachers is unlikely to occur organically, districts and states must implement policies to address the disparity and reverse existing patterns (Clotfelter et al., 2005; Guarino et al., 2011; Howell, 2011)

**Student-Teacher Relationships.** The relationship between teachers and their students is another factor that can affect student success. White teachers frequently presume that African American students' learning and achievement difficulties are due to deficiencies in their students, such as a lack of enthusiasm, a poor work ethic, or a lack of family support. (Tsoi-A, 2015). Teachers fail to invest in knowing and creating relationships with individual students; thus, these misconceptions persist (Flores, 2007). This deficit mindset is harmful because it affects and directs teachers' attitudes and behaviors toward their students. Valencia (2015) demonstrated that an alarming number of educators have deficit ideologies about African American student abilities and often view these students as less academically engaged. In addition, research
indicates that teachers have lower expectations for and respond less positively to poor and low SES students (Rist, 1970). Teachers of lower SES students also report fewer positive perceptions of the school and classroom climate than teachers of higher SES students (Alexander, Entwisle, and Thompson, 1987). White instructors, who make up the vast majority of the teaching staff in the United States, have lower expectations for African American students than African American teachers, significantly impacting these students’ educational outcomes (Flowers, Milner, & Moore, 2003; Hansen & Quintero, 2016; Papageorge & Gershenson, 2016).

**Racialized Tracking.** Racialized tracking, which is the practice of disproportionately populating higher-level classrooms with White students and lower-level classes with African American students, is another factor that contributes to success discrepancies. (Office for Civil Rights, 2016; Ricks, 2014; Valant & Newark, 2017). Tracking is “designating students for separate educational paths based on their academic performance as teens or younger” (Kohli, 2014, p. 3). Scholars found that educators are less likely to refer African American students for advanced courses and discourage these students from attempting to enroll in advanced courses (Wright et al., 2017). “The DoE and advocates have said tracking perpetuates a modern system of segregation that favors White students and keeps students of color, many of them Black, from equal long-term achievement” (Kohli, 2014). Scholars agree that the prevailing requirements of the teacher and school counselor recommendations for rigorous coursework combined with lingering institutional inequities, standardized test score requirements, and lowered expectations for African American students have created a system in which interested African American students are dissuaded from applying to college in high school courses, and students with lingering academic potential are overlooked (Ford, Grantham, & Whiting, 2008; Henfield, Moore, & Wood, 2008; Moore, Ford, & Milner, 2005).
Comprehensive School Counseling Programs and the Achievement Gap

School counselors design and deliver comprehensive school counseling programs to promote student achievement (ASCA, 2019). By properly defining, managing, delivering, and assessing school counseling programs, school counselors can be instrumental in closing the achievement gap.

Comprehensive school counseling programs are driven by student data and based on academic, career, and personal/social development standards, promoting and enhancing the learning process for all students. School counselors can impact the achievement gap by examining school-wide data and using the data to deliver an effective group intervention. In addition, by analyzing and interpreting the data gathered through assessments, school counselors can create and develop specific goals that effectively address the holistic needs of students and reflect the mission of the school counseling program and district (ASCA, 2012; Gladding 2009; Erford, 2011).

For example, one study evaluated the impact of a group counseling intervention on African American students’ achievement rates during the spring administration of a high-stakes standardized exam (Bruce et al., 2009). As a result, 80% of students who participated in the intervention received passing scores on the English Language Arts and Math sections of the GHSGT. Additionally, the achievement gap between African American and White students in enhanced math narrowed with the passing rate of African American students at 63%, compared to 70% of White students. The previous year's passing rate of African American students was 37%, indicating the utilization of group counseling and disaggregating data can promote the achievement of underachieving students (Bruce et al., 2009).
Camizzi and colleagues (2009) discovered that school counselors were crucial in influencing minority and poor students to choose more demanding coursework. Furthermore, Akos and Ellis (2008) urged school counselors to use individual and systemic interventions to aid students' academic and racial identity development. School counselors are gatekeepers to college in high school opportunities (American School Counselor Association [ASCA], 2012; Ndura, Robinson, & Ochs, 2003; Ohrt, Lambie, & Ieva, 2009). To improve African American access to the Advanced Placement curriculum and increase achievement on the A.P. Psychology national examination, a school counselor, a school counselor intern, an Advanced Placement Psychology teacher, and a counselor educator conducted a study. (Davis, P., Davis, M. P., & Mobley, J. A., 2013). Because the school counselor is often critical role in A.P. enrollment, researchers have suggested that school counselors are in a unique position to reverse institutional barriers and challenge the deficit thinking that propagates the A.P. equity and excellence gaps for African American students (Ndura et al., 2003; Ohrt et al., 2009). The team systematically enrolled African American students in A.P. Psychology and supported them through group and individual therapy to build an achievement-oriented cohort that prioritized peer relationships and academic success. (Davis, P., Davis, M. P., & Mobley, J. A., 2013). The team provided personal-social and academic interventions through an intensive 2-week summer program and weekly group counseling sessions throughout the school year. African American students who engaged in this program (n = 12) outperformed African American students who were enrolled in the course but did not participate in the program (n = 10) by a factor of .046, p = .046. Additionally, the research group outperformed national norms for African American students taking the same exam (national mean = 2.2, p=0.001). There was no statistically significant difference between the research group and the White students (n = 62). Despite this, there was a significant difference
between the control group and White students, p 001, suggesting that the program may have helped close some gaps between African American and White students. (Davis, P., Davis, M. P., & Mobley, J. A, 2013). Therefore, this study suggests that intentional efforts by school counselors can help reduce the racial disparities in students' college readiness opportunities.

Berger (2013) evaluated the impact of small group counseling intervention designed for underachieving students. The study results demonstrated significant improvement for ninth and tenth-grade underachieving students in organizational skills, time management, and motivation (Berger, 2013).

**Evolution of the School Counselor's Role**

The role of a school counselor has continued to evolve to meet the needs of students over time. As we know it today, school counseling began as vocational guidance in the early 1900s (ASCA, 2019). In the following years, it has evolved into a comprehensive model to meet the holistic needs of students. During the 1940s, there was a need to expand school counseling as schools wanted to focus on improving their services. The selection and training of school counselors also received attention and support with the passage of the Vocational Education Act of 1946 and the National Defense Act (NDEA) of 1958. In addition, the American School Counseling Association was established in 1952 as a division of the American Personnel and Guidance Association (ASCA, 2019). As a result, school counselors could now advocate for the profession through a nationally recognized organization.

During the 1960s and 1970s, there were several concerns about how the field was growing as a service model. A need to differentiate the practices of elementary school counselors and high school counselors was evident. Confusion arose about whether school counseling was
more psychological or educational. Calls for change led to the development of a comprehensive program approach to school counseling (ASCA, 2019).

For the next few years into the 20th century, training programs to help personnel in school districts plan, design, and implement comprehensive school counseling programs were initiated (ASCA, 2019). Stakeholders decided that school counselors needed to become more data-oriented, using data to identify school concerns and student needs. So, in 2003, the American School Counselor Association created the ASCA National Model. A second edition was published in 2005, the third edition in 2013, and the latest fourth edition in 2019 (ASCA, 2019).

The American School Counselor Association National Model was developed to unify the profession and ensure that students receive equitable access to comprehensive, developmental, and preventive school counseling programming through the delivery of school counseling curriculum and services (ASCA: 2003, 2005, 2012). School Counselors act as advocates, leaders, collaborators, and consultants who create systematic change by providing equitable educational access and success by connecting their school counseling programs to the district's mission and improvement plan (ASCA, 2019). In addition, school counselors work to improve the personal/social, academic, and career aspects of students’ lives. They are charged with challenging system procedures and policies that are barriers to student success (ASCA, 2012).

ASCA encourages school counselors to assure that students from culturally diverse backgrounds have access to appropriate services and opportunities that promote maximum development” (ASCA, 2004). By analyzing and interpreting the data gathered through assessments, school counselors can create and develop specific goals that effectively address the holistic needs of students (ASCA, 2012). Professional school counselors at all levels make a
significant, vital, and indispensable contribution toward the academic, career, and personal/social success of “at-risk” students (ASCA, 2012). However, even if school counselors design their programs aligned with the model, additional barriers may need to be removed before underserved students achieve (Holcomb-McCoy, 2007).

Many school counselors believe that their graduate training did not fully prepare them for working with minority and low-income students in urban settings. Counselors point to a lack of opportunity to explore the urban education setting and no curriculum on college preparedness counseling (Savitz-Romer, 2011). Many school counselor education programs have one multicultural course, but there is no guarantee that issues related to the achievement or development of African American students are discussed. The Council for the Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs (CACREP, 2009) mandates that programs wanting to be accredited have a component dedicated to addressing multiculturalism. Although CACREP has mandated at least one multicultural course in the school counseling curriculum, further steps could be taken to ensure that the needs of African American students are met.

Although many school counselors have been trained to look for sources of problems within the individual among culturally diverse students, the origins of the students’ situation could result from external or contextual forces such as racial discrimination, social disadvantage, or poverty (Pope-Davis et al., 2003). Therefore, the researcher suggests a social justice framework approach to school counseling in the next section.

Theoretical Approach to Reconceptualize the Achievement Gap and Dual Enrollment

In this section, the researcher utilized a social justice approach to school counseling to address the oppressive systems created without considering minorities and benefitting the
majority. In addition, the researcher discussed counter-story-narrative tenet of Critical Race Theory to oppose the deficit ideologies, giving voice to what African American students experience.

**Social justice Approach to School Counseling**

Recent initiatives from the American School Counseling Association (ASCA) call for the equitable treatment of African American students within school counseling programs (2020, 2018). While African American students face unique societal challenges that may contribute to these gaps, it is imperative that school-based leaders actively work to remove barriers to student success (Goodman et al., 2018). Lee (2005) emphasized that schools must refine traditional counseling models and roles to serve diverse students. Social justice entails an ongoing, collaborative approach that must be intentional and proactive (Sandifer et al., 2021). Social justice recognizes that there are situations in which applying the same rules to unequal groups can generate unequal results. Whereas equal opportunity and human rights apply to everyone, social justice targets marginalized groups in society and focuses on the disadvantaged (Sandifer et al., 2021).

Social justice approaches to school counseling require school counselors to be equitable in their practices. Equity requires school counselors to treat students differently based on aspects of the student’s culture, including race, ethnicity, gender, and economic class (Holcomb-McCoy, 2007). Equity demands that school counselors resist using aspects of culture or external factors as excuses for not setting high standards and demanding the most from students. This forces school counselors and educators to focus on students, not their deficits.

This assumption leads the school counselor to take responsible action that eliminates systematic oppression in racism, sexism, heterosexism, classism, and other biases. (Holcomb-
Essentially, a social justice approach to school counseling is centered on reducing the effects of oppression on students and improving equity and access to educational services. Holcomb-McCoy (2007) suggests that school counselors can play an influential role in closing the achievement gap when they incorporate the principles of social justice into their practice.

**Social Justice and Advocacy-Focused Counseling**

Social Justice Advocacy is a term commonly utilized to describe action steps initiated to remove obstacles to success for underrepresented students (Goodman et al., 2018). Holcomb-McCoy (2007) introduced a social justice framework for school counselors to help close the achievement gap and remedy past inequities in schools. The framework requires that school counselors address six key areas or functions. Counseling and clinical assessment using an ecological and environmental framework; consultation; connecting schools, families, and communities; collecting and utilizing data to ensure equity; challenging bias; and coordinating student services that promote student success. This approach is rooted in a social, cultural, and ecological understanding of students’ and their families' psychological, emotional, and academic functioning (Holcomb-McCoy et al., as cited in Henfield & Washington, 2016). The framework encourages the school counselors to admit they are often a part of the problem, even though it may be unintentional. In addition, they must acknowledge how specific groups of people benefit from the oppression of others.

**Social Justice Strategies.**

School counselors must intentionally acknowledge race and culture when working with students, but school counseling services must cultivate academic achievement (Holcomb-McCoy et al., as cited in Henfield & Washington, 2016). Consequently, school counselors who formulate
interventions that reflect students’ familiar cultural preferences may help participants develop and sustain intellectual engagement. One strategy is for school counselors to use group work to advance personal and social well-being and simultaneously address academic development (Brigman & Campbell, 2003; Steen & Kaffenberger, 2007) while considering students’ racial, ethnic, or ethnicity cultural (Bemak & Chung, 2004). Ultimately, this can lead to academic engagement and achievement (Day-Vines & Day Hairston, 2005).

Ford (2013) reports that “group counseling experiences help Blacks increase their sense of hope and optimism, decrease their feelings of alienation, develop more effective coping techniques, and acquire more effective socialization skills.” Furthermore, collective identity proves to be more powerful than individual identity (Ford, 2013). Thus, group work with the population can use these characteristics to allow for a strong interplay between group goals and group members responsible for achieving those goals. For example, Bemak and colleagues (2005) suggested that school counselors leading groups should be attentive to the cultural differences of members and should take into account the member's cultural backgrounds and their level of racial or ethnic identity development. To do this effectively, school counselors must know and understand their own racial and ethnic identity and cultural worldview and recognize their potential to impact the students’ identity development (Holcomb-McCoy, 2007). Therefore, schools need to be intentional about the types of programs and initiatives they put in place to support African American students.

**Critical Race Theory of Counter Storytelling**

Critical Race Theory’s tenet of Counter Storytelling was applied to analyze the racialized experiences of the participants. Gloria Ladson-Billings (1998) challenges us to think about critical race theory and education. Ladson-Billings argues that critical race theory can help
explain the inequities in education. “If we are serious about solving these problems in schools and classrooms, we have to be serious about intense study and careful rethinking of race and education” (Ladson-Billings, 1998, p. 22).

Solorzano and Yosso (2002) argue that counter-storytelling can be used as an analytical framework for education research in critical race methodology. “A critical race methodology provides a tool to “counter” deficit storytelling” (Solorzano & Yosso (2002), p. 23). In addition, the critical race methodology allows People of Color to tell their stories. “We define critical race methodology as a theoretically grounded approach to research that foregrounds race and racism in all aspects of the research project” (Solorzano & Yosso, 2002, p. 24).

Critical Race Theory is a theoretical framework that researchers use to explore racism, privilege, oppression, and power that marginalized populations face through socio-political and institutional processes (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017). Researchers who use this framework make explicit their concern for marginalized groups and show a deeply rooted desire to expose, advocate, and confront injustices concerning them (Ladison-Billings, 1998). “A critical race methodology in education challenges White privilege rejects notions of “neutral” research or “objective” researchers and exposes deficit-informed research that silences and distorts epistemologies of color (Delgado Bernal, 1998)” (Solorzano & Yosso, 2002, p. 26).

Racism and White privilege play a role in storytelling in our educational system. “It is within the context of racism that monovocal stories about the low educational achievement and attainment of students of color are told” (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002, p. 27). These stories are being told through the lens of White privilege. “Whiteness is a category of privilege” (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002, p. 27). Delgado and Stefancic (1997) defined “White privilege as a system of opportunities and benefits conferred upon people simply because they are White” (Solórzano &
These racial stories are called majoritarian stories. “Counter-stories can shatter complacency, challenge the dominant discourse on race, and further the struggle for racial reform” (Solorzano & Yosso, 2002, p. 32).

Stinson (2008) conducted a study to document the counterstories of four academically and mathematically successful African American male students. The participants’ counterstories revealed that each had acquired a robust mathematics identity as a component of his overall efforts toward success. How the participants acquired such “uncharacteristic” mathematics identities was found in how they understood the socio-cultural discourses of U.S. society and negotiated the specific discourses surrounding male African Americans.

Henfield and colleagues (2008) conducted a study using Critical Race Theory as a theoretical framework to examine the meaning, context, and process by which 12 African American students in gifted education programs formulated perceptions of their experiences in those programs. Critical issues facing gifted students, ways to navigate the perils of gifted education, and the benefits of gifted education emerged as themes. The themes highlight the salience of race inside and outside gifted education. When working with African American students, the research findings also provide practical applications for teachers, principals, and school counselors.

Another study used counter stories to understand how African American boys understood college readiness. Critical Race Theory counter-narrative was used to explore five African American high school males' mentoring experience in the church and high school experience related to their college readiness (Buckley, 2017). Mentors are relatable advocates, and future college preparation and faith inspiration emerged as themes. The students agreed that it helped to
have African American male church mentors as relatable advocates as it inspired them to go to college.

Counter-storytelling offers space to conduct and present research grounded in the experiences and knowledge of People of Color. Therefore, this investigation provides African American students who participated in the social justice-informed program while dual-enrolled an opportunity to express their education experience in their own words, countering the deficit ideology. Specifically, this research aids in clarifying how African American students see dual enrollment and the comprehensive school counseling program, what African American students see as factors that contribute or hinder their success in dual enrollment, what aspect of the comprehensive school counseling program is valued by African American students, and how aspects of the group intervention and the school counselor presence impact African American students.

**Chapter Summary**

This chapter presents a broad review of the literature on a social justice approach to school counseling. A clear understanding of the benefits of dual enrollment, barriers African American students face in inequity and academic achievement, and the rationale for school counselors to take a social justice approach to school counseling was provided. These studies highlight several barriers African American students face pertaining to the achievement gap, including lack of resources and oppressive school practices. Additionally, this study highlights interventions school counselors can use, such as comprehensive school counseling programs, social justice advocacy, and group counseling interventions.
CHAPTER III: METHODS

This chapter aims to introduce and discuss the research process related to this study. It restates the purpose and research questions, discusses the rationale for the selected research approach and design, and outlines the target population and background information for sampling, sampling procedures, data collection, and analysis.

Restatement of Purpose

Dual enrollment of minority students has been an area of intense research activity within the last decade. Out of these studies has grown a heightened interest in the emerging concept of social-justice, diversity, and equity as factors that shape the outcome of dual enrollment success. Still, research has been focused primarily on the deficit model and is limited to looking at the disparity. Thus, research studies dealing with African American students' perceived experience, success or satisfaction has often relied on prefigured categories.

This study explores the perceived experience of dually enrolled African American students who attended the social-justice informed comprehensive school program at Pittsburgh Westinghouse to generate a substantive theory of social-justice informed school counseling approach. This qualitative study provides educators with valuable insight into promoting dual-enrolled African American students' equity and academic achievement through social justice-informed comprehensive school counseling programs. The study uses interviews based on constructive grounded theory design to guide the collecting and coding of interview data to identify emerging categories and generate substantive theory.

This study was designed to answer the following research questions:

1. What does dual enrollment mean to African American students?
2. What are the risk and protective factors/barriers for the academic experience of dually enrolled African American students?

3. How is a social justice-informed school counseling approach supportive of African American students during dual enrollment?
   d. What aspects of the social justice-informed school counseling approach help support African American students’ dual enrollment?
   e. What aspects of the social justice-informed school counseling approach do students want to change to enhance their experience in dual enrollment?
   f. How does participation in a social justice-informed school counseling program facilitate the success of dually enrolled African American students?

Rational for Qualitative Research Approach

The study utilizes a qualitative research approach and constructivist grounded theory method. The qualitative research approach is best suited when the research is looking for emergent knowledge rather than "tightly prefigured" ideas (Creswell, 2013). Qualitative research entails recognizing that the research is at times studying the subjective reality of others and that "the research own life experiences and the act of research itself must be taken into consideration as part of the study at hand” (Marshall & Rossman, 1999, p.4). This qualitative research approach seeks to understand a social phenomenon and construct theories through participants’ experiences, using iterative data collection and analysis. The qualitative research approach involves fieldwork in the natural environment and produces new knowledge and detailed understanding inductively or deductively. This study induces a new theory or framework by exploring the obtained data. As a primarily inductive research design, the grounded theory research design was used for data collection and analysis.
**Research Design**

Grounded theory is a research design of the qualitative research approach. This study's data collection process, data management, and data analysis followed a constructive grounded theory design.

The purpose of grounded theory is to develop an emerging theory from participants’ interview data. Undertaking grounded theory research can be complex depending on the study's particular purpose. While there are several approaches to the grounded theory framework, this study is based on the constructivist grounded theory by Kathy Charmaz (2003). Constructivist grounded theory generates new theories through inductive analysis of participants' data rather than pre-existing theoretical frameworks (Charmaz, 2014). The constructivist grounded theory recognizes that the categories, concepts, and theoretical level of analysis emerge from the researcher’s interactions within the field and questions about the data (Charmaz, 2014). The narrowing of research questions, the creation of concepts and categories, and the integration of the constructed theoretical framework reflect what and how the researcher thinks and does about shaping and collecting the data (Charmaz, 2003, p. 271).

Following the constructive grounded theory design, data was analyzed counter-narratives to address the gap in the current knowledge related to dual enrolled African American students. The researcher coded participants' responses and analyzed the themes that will be helpful in ongoing strategies in providing equity and academic support for future dual-enrolled African American students. Grounded theory “allows for varied fundamental assumptions, data gathering approaches, analytic emphases, and theoretical levels” (Charmaz, 2003, p. 252).
Study Population and Sampling Approach

African American Students who were dually enrolled at Pittsburgh Westinghouse in the Pittsburgh Public school district were the target population of this study. Pittsburgh Westinghouse is one of the ten high schools and one of four 6-12 schools in the Pittsburgh Public School. The school serves 687 economically disadvantaged students (49% Female, 51% male) in grades 6-12 and is located in the Homewood neighborhood of Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. The minority enrollment at Westinghouse is 99% of the student body (majority African American), which is higher than the Pennsylvania state average of 34%. For the 2018-19 school year, the school was placed in the bottom 50% of all schools in Pennsylvania for overall test scores.

The study used purposive sampling to recruit the study participants. Purposive sampling is beneficial as the participants identified have had to have participated in the comprehensive school counseling program (Bluff, 2005; Tie et al., 2019). The sampling criteria include: (a) Being African American adult (age 18+), (b) those who attended the social-justice informed school counseling program implemented in 2019 as part of the dual enrollment program, and (c) being willing to participate in this study.

Context and Background Information about the Study Participants

Dual Enrollment Collaboration at Pittsburgh Westinghouse. As an African American school counselor working in an urban high school, I get excited about helping students get into college. This may be due to the constant plight of African American education and my struggles with college readiness. I understood the difficulties of meeting academic expectations with no support, guidance, or resources and not feeling comfortable enough to reach out to someone for help. This may be the very reason I decided to become a school counselor. When I inquired to teachers and staff on why we did not offer dual enrollment courses, I was told that, “Dual
enrollment just isn’t for our kids,” “We tried it years ago and they all failed,” and “Well, this is Westinghouse” as if academic success was so out of reach for our students because of the neighborhood they lived in. I was immediately disheartened by the deficit ideologies and low expectations exhibited by our staff.

In 2019, through a partnership with the Pittsburgh Promise, the 11th-grade students were offered the opportunity to be dual enrolled at the Community College of Allegheny County (CCAC). After meeting with the entire 11th-grade class, 20 students reluctantly decided to listen to what I had to say about the opportunity. As a group, the students listed internal and external barriers they felt would interfere with their ability to take a college course in high school successfully. Additionally, I asked what support they felt they needed to be successful. The response that resonated with me the most was, “What if we don’t know what we need? How would we know what to ask?” It opened my eyes to the high expectations placed on first-generation students to attend college. However, many of them lack the knowledge necessary to navigate the college application process, let alone the knowledge of how to be successful in college.

I told the students I would put together a school counseling program to provide them with support in the areas they felt were barriers. I started by collecting data. Then, I used what the students perceived as barriers to make a pre/post survey following the guidelines of a SMART Goal from the ASCA model (ASCA, 2012). The acronym SMART stands for specific, measurable, achievable, result-focused, and time-bound. SMART goals allow school counselors to design comprehensive school counseling programs derived from student behavior, attendance, and academic outcomes data. I came up with:

1. Believe I can successfully pass a college class in high school
2. I believe college is affordable

3. I feel comfortable taking college class with people I know

4. I know what career I want to pursue when I graduate high school

5. I will be able to manage my high school work along with my other responsibilities

Based on the data, I began to put interventions into place. First, I let the students know that I would meet with them once a week and do a Social Emotional Learning (SEL) group related to areas they felt were barriers to success. Next, I met with the Dean of Students at the Community College of Allegheny County to inform him that I have 20 students who want to dual enroll. As an African American man, he was excited to collaborate with our school and provide support to the students. He came to our school to meet with the students, helped sign them up for classes, and served as a point person for the college. As an alternative to doing weekly groups, he suggested we enroll the students in the college's Academic and Professional Development course to ensure the students would get the weekly intervention and assign me as the instructor.

I wanted the students to get the full college experience. Therefore, instead of having our teachers instruct the classes at the building, I had the students walk to the local Community College of Allegheny County branch Monday through Thursday. On Fridays, the students stayed in the building where I taught their class in our college prep room. The preparation for the program started in the spring of 2019, and the students started the classes the following fall. The courses took place from September 2019 to December 2019, over 15 weeks. For the final exam, I had the students present their experience of being dual enrolled to members of the community, Pittsburgh Public Schools, and the Community College of Allegheny County. 17 of the 20
students finished the semester. The three students who had to withdraw moved out of the school district.

The students took Introduction to Sociology for three credits, Intro to Computer Information and Technology for three credits, and Academic and Professional Development with me for one credit. The students earned a cumulative 2.9 GPA in Introduction to Sociology, 3.0 GPA in Introduction to Sociology, and 3.9 GPA in the Academic and Professional Development course. Collectively, they earned a 3.2GPA. Without the Academic and Professional Development course, they earned a 2.9 GPA which was higher than the 2.6GPA achieved by the general admitted first-year students at CCAC. Not only were we able to achieve academic success, but Pittsburgh Westinghouse had the most students dual enrolled in the entire School District. The cohort of students continued to take college classes in high school while participating in school counseling intervention groups. In addition, we were able to grow the program by offering students the opportunity to gain college credits through Advanced Placement programs and a College in High School program through a collaboration with the University of Pittsburgh. Not only did the entire cohort of students graduate on time, some obtained over 20 college credits they were able to transfer to a post-secondary institution.

Potential participants from the program's cohort were juniors in high school at the intervention time. This cohort of students graduated from high school in the summer of 2021, are all 18 or older, and either recently started college or entered the workforce.

**Recruitment Process**

The researcher reached out to the African American members of the cohort via Facebook and email. Due to the nature of the relationship the researcher has built with the students over the years in the role of their school counselor, the researcher kept in contact with several of the
students who participated in the comprehensive school counseling program. Eight of the African American students who participated in the social justice informed comprehensive school counseling program in 2019.

Generating and Collecting Data

Semi-Structured Interview Guide

Qualitative researchers are the principal data collection and analysis (Charmaz, 1996; Strauss & Corbin, 1997). The researcher used semi-structured interviews to discover a specific experiences from the participants. “The semi-structured interview maintains a conversational style in which the interviewer probes the respondent and is free to ask questions differently for all respondents” (McDougal, 2014, pp. 264-265). Semi-structured interviews (SSI) use open-ended questions to allow the participants to provide more complete answers. “The purpose of SSIs is to ascertain participants’ perspectives regarding an experience pertaining to the research topic” (McIntosh & Morse, 2015, p. 1). The researcher prepared a set of semi-structured interview items (see Appendix C) related to the research questions so that the discovery process and participants' experiences can illuminate (Bluff, 2005; Bryant & Charmaz, 2007), but was not restricted to only those questions. “Although a semi-structured interview involves a standard set of questions, it also allows interviewers to ask sub-questions and develop new questions based on interviewees’ responses. (McDougal, 2014, p. 265).

The Researcher as a tool. Scholars in qualitative research have suggested some principles in collecting qualitative data that ensure that the data collection process remains rigorous and decreases bias. These principles include being aware of our biases and considering that data is a two-way street where the participants tell their stories. In turn, the researcher tells them their understanding of their stories. Hence a process of checks and balances occurs.
Qualitative data collectors should be nonjudgmental, active listeners, and culturally sensitive (Charmaz, 1996; Strauss & Corbin, 1997).

As an urban school counselor, I designed the comprehensive school counseling program the volunteers participated in. While other methodological discourses are what we call “detached observers,” it is essential to disclose my involvement with this work from the ground up. There is no detachment between the research participants and myself because of my role as a school counselor. Subsequently, there is no separation between researchers of color and the subjects in critical race studies. Therefore, I came to this research project as a school counselor concerned with the inequities of African American students’ dual enrollment opportunities and performance.

H. Richard Milner IV (2007) argues that researchers should be racially and culturally aware of themselves and others while doing educational research. “The premise of the argument is those dangers are seen, unseen, and unforeseen can emerge for researchers when they do not pay careful attention to their own and others’ racialized and cultural systems of coming to know, knowing and experiencing the world” (Milner, 2007, p. 388). Even though we are of the same race, I was mindful and acknowledged that my racial and cultural experiences might be different from theirs. Milner (2007) suggests that a student’s learning may be impeded when the teacher ignores both the race and culture of the student and themselves. Milner (2007) concludes “that matters of race and culture are important considerations in the process of conducting research” (p. 397). Milner insists that the researcher consider race and culture while doing educational research to serve all students realistically.

Researchers of color position themselves in their research according to who they are and their experiences. In Denzin & Lincoln (2003), Gloria Ladson-Billings said, “In my own
research, I have attempted to tell a story about myself as well as about my work” (p. 416). Therefore, I must acknowledge how my experience as an African American man affects this research. As I included myself in the research and data collection, I was intentional in separating my biases to make the research about the participants and not myself. Ladson-Billings. Similarly, Tillman (2002) argues “that there is a need to consider research frameworks that can help researchers to fully capture the experiences of African Americans-their struggles as well as their success” (p. 3). I acknowledged the risks that including myself in my research may have, including the potential effect it could have on my interpretation of the experiences of the African American male participants. In order to minimize this risk, I engaged in self-reflection and journaling to monitor how much I considered my cultural knowledge to accurately interpret and validate the experiences of African Americans within the context of dual enrollment.

Researchers of color bring their identity and experiences into their research, which impacts how they interpret data within a social justice context.

**Data Collection Procedures**

The data for this study consists of information gathered from interviewing the African American students who participated in comprehensive school counseling to promote equity and academic achievement in dual enrollment courses. Participants were interviewed via an online format, precisely zoom meetings. The interviews were recorded with full permission from participants and transcribed for data analysis.

**Data Analysis**

Qualitative data may be analyzed through coding. “Coding, or thematic analysis, involves translating or reducing data into categories based on patterns or themes” (McDougal, 2014, p. 275). Charmaz (2003) observes that coding in grounded theory may take us in surprising
directions. “Unlike quantitative research that requires data to fit into preconceived standardized codes, the researcher’s interpretations of data shape his or her emergent codes in grounded theory” (Charmaz, 2003, p. 258). “Ryan and Bernard (2003) identify several things for researchers to look for when they are searching for themes: repetition, indigenous typologies, metaphor and analogies, similarities and differences, linguistic connections, missing data, and theoretical material” (McDougal, 2014, p. 276). Various methods while coding the information from semi-structured interviews. Critical race epistemology uncovers, or centers marginalized voices of color as a means to reform equity and academic achievement in dual enrollment for dual-enrolled African American students.

The researcher followed the steps and procedures that are outlined in Tie, Briks, & Francis (2019) framework for data collection, coding procedures, and data analysis of this study. In this framework, the data analysis involves the following four phases. Figure 1 provides a diagrammatic depiction of the analysis procedure.

1. **Initial Coding:** In this phase, the researcher started with open coding and giving meaning to the data and form category. Comparisons among the data and continually ask questions about what was and what was not understood. Each line of the data was be coded to facilitate an analytic stance toward the work and begin building the theory. The generated questions can be used in future interviews to gather relevant information for the study or to clarify concepts.

2. **Axial /Intermediate coding:** This phase involves selecting a core category and checking the data saturation. Axial coding was utilized to make connections between core categories and subcategories which allowed a conceptual framework to emerge. This phase also includes linking the codes to form core categories and become more conceptual, which allows
relationships and patterns to emerge. The relationship between concepts in this stage were verified by constant comparison, which enabled the theory to be developed. In other words, the categories in each interview transcript were compared with the other interview transcripts to ground the analysis in the data. Memos were used to ground the analysis in the data and define patterns in relation to the data (Kolb, 2012). Once identified, the core category and systematically connected it to other categories, the core category became the central category that linked and accounted for variations in the data. This process integrated and refined the major categories with the core category to emerge the grounded theory. This step ensures data saturation is reached, that adequate information is gathered to reflect the perspectives of the study participants accurately and that the theory did not omit any crucial information.

Data saturation was assessed by conducting a thematic saturation analysis. The process of thematic saturation analysis involves identifying the themes and categories in each interview and comparing them to assess the degree to which the themes and categories explain the data. Additionally, this comparison identified whether more explanation is necessary to account for variations in the data. Once data saturation was reached, no further data collection was necessary, and the sample size was finalized (Bluff, 2005; Charmaz; 1996; Kolb, 2012; Strauss & Corbin, 1997), and the researcher moved to phase three.

3. **Selective/Advanced coding**: This phase was guided by the counter-storytelling approach from Critical Race theory. Storylines were identified and code and theory emerged from the data. This process allowed the theoretical code and framework to formulate.
Figure 1. Coding and Analysis Procedure (adopted from Tie, et al., 2019)
Considerations to Enhance the Quality of Research

When performing qualitative research, the constructs of credibility, dependability, confirmability, and transferability must all be considered. (Lincoln and Guba, 1985). Credibility aims to address how congruent the findings are with reality. The qualitative researcher can utilize methods to ensure that the findings are reflective of the participants’ reality. In this study, the researcher used member checking to address credibility. Member checking calls for the researcher to review the interpretations of the data along with codes and categories generated with the participants and make changes as needed. This procedure aids in the reduction of researcher bias, the clarification of participant responses, and the increase of researcher reflexivity. (Bowen, 2009; Kolb, 2012). Dependability is concerned with the stability and consistency of the findings. In order to establish dependability in this study, the researcher was transparent in all processes of the study so that future researchers could repeat the work if they choose and so that readers can assess for themselves the rigor of the work. The planning of the study and the execution of the study is described and discussed in detail so that others can assess this work. Furthermore, data gathering methods are detailed, documented, and discusses field activities so that others can assess how well the theory is supported by the data. (Creswell & Miller, 2000; Marshall & Rossman, 2016; Shenton, 2004). Confirmability is the researcher's concern with how well the findings reflect the ideas, experiences, and voices of the participants. As a result, an audit trail was created consistent of documentation to support the decisions made throughout the research project. Details of the analytical decisions made throughout the project are made explicit so that others could retrace the steps and arrive at the same conclusion or theory (Bowen, 2009). The researcher provided a diagrammatic audit trail for this study using a data-oriented approach. A data-oriented approach to the audit trail details how the data was
collected and processed, how the codes were formed, how the categories were formed, and how
the three-step coding process led to the formation of the theory (Shenton, 2004). Transferability
concerns whether or not the research is applicable to other populations. In qualitative studies, the
reader decides whether or not the study and findings are applicable to a population they are
concerned with. To make this decision, the reader must be provided with sufficient detailed
contextual information. In order to accomplish this, boundaries of the study were defined
including the number of participants, detailed descriptions of the populations contributing to the
study, the number and length of the interviews, and the time period of the data collection
(Creswell & Miller, 2000; Shenton, 2004). In the research process, the four constructs set forth
by Lincoln & Guba (1985) were satisfied to ensure that this study was rigorous and of
satisfactory quality. Further, satisfying these constructs helped to ensure that researcher bias was
accounted for and decreased, along with ensuring that the resulting theory was grounded in the
data. The researcher engaged in several techniques to address credibility, dependability,
confirmability, and transferability, including member checking and providing an audit trail with
descriptive and visual components. Using these techniques improved the study's trustworthiness
by making the research process clear.

To address validity issues during the data collection and analysis, a reflexive journal was
maintained to protect against researcher bias. Journal entries were made after each interview to
openly address any preconceived opinions and to reflect upon subjectivity (Glesne, 2006). For
accuracy and validity, in-depth and verbatim audio recordings and transcriptions were used.
Member checking was utilized to help triangulate interpretations. Following each interview, the
participants were allowed to read and comment on their personal profile as it was formed.
Member checking is utilized to rule out misinterpretation and researcher bias (Shank, 2002).
Participants were encouraged to review the material for accuracy and make suggestions for improvements (Stake, 1995). Disclosure of all documentation during the research process was done to maximize the trustworthiness of the data.

**Ethical Consideration**

In this study, the use of individual interviews provided privacy and confidentiality. The participants choose a pseudonym before audio recording to protect their anonymity. The Institutional Review Board of Duquesne University provided approval for this study before receiving the informed consent of all participants. Participants gave verbal and written informed consent before being asked any interview questions. Before conducting the interviews, the purpose of the research was explained, along with their rights, the procedure to withdraw, and confidentiality to each participant.

The participants in this study were informed of the strategy for data storage. Audio-recorded interviews were saved electronically in a password-protected file on a personal computer. The participants were aware that only the researcher had access to the original audio recording files. For transcription, all identifying data was removed. The transcriptions and audio files will be retained for up to five years.

**Advocacy and Intervention**

Throughout the field work and data collection process, the researcher anticipated some issues around financial aid to arise due to the nature of the research topic. For example, some students report negative experiences during college enrollment and not having enough money. Therefore, the researcher provided participants with scholarship information to support the financial burdens of college costs.
CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS

This grounded theory qualitative study explores how dually enrolled African American students navigate and accelerate their success by attending a social-justice informed school counseling group program. This chapter presents the findings and themes that emerged from the data. The first section highlights the participants' demographic information and other essential attributes to understand the context that underlies the experience of dually enrolled African American Students who participated in the social-justice informed school counseling group intervention at Pittsburgh Westinghouse. The second section reviews the analysis procedures and the saturation analysis to provide an audit trail. The final section of the chapter presents the categories with their related themes.

Research Questions

Consistent with the statement of the problem and the purpose of this study, the following research questions were designed to guide the study:

1. What does dual enrollment mean to African American students?
2. What are the risk and protective factors/barriers to the academic experience of dually enrolled African American students?
3. How is a social justice-informed school counseling approach supportive of African American students during dual enrollment?
   a) What aspects of the social justice-informed school counseling approach help support African American students’ dual enrollment?
   b) What aspects of the social justice-informed school counseling approach do students want to change to enhance their experience in dual enrollment?
c) How does participation in a social justice-informed school counseling program facilitate the success of dually enrolled African American students?

**Researcher Role and Bias**

In this section, I present my biases stemming from my experience as an African American male graduate student, as a school counselor who had a working relationship with each participant, and as the social justice informed group intervention program facilitator. I am in my 8th year of working as a school counselor in Pittsburgh and have been providing individual and group counseling for African American students who enrolled at Pittsburgh Westinghouse for five years. I have implemented the social justice-informed school counseling program that serves more than 700 students a year for the past two years. I have biases regarding dual enrollment and African American Students. However, those biases are spread across two perspectives: an African American graduate student and an African American school counselor in a low-income school setting.

Moreover, in my experiences, those two perspectives are in constant interaction, conversation, re-examination, and intermingling. Interestingly, I constantly compare my knowledge of the participants as their counselors with my own experience as African American graduate student/counselor. Additionally, I have added a third concern through my reading extensively for the literature review. However, I cannot say which perspective I lean toward most strongly. As an African American graduate student, I cherish memories of supportive relationships and social interactions outside class with graduate students and professors in counselor education. But I also dealt with covert and overt racism, microaggressions, and feeling unsupported while in school. As a graduate student, I can recall being left out of opportunities that seem only to be offered to White students. I constantly dealt with feelings of isolation, with
no one to go to for help. And I would often feel I was not capable or intelligent enough to succeed. Even when I was doing well, imposter syndrome would keep me down, causing me to discredit my accomplishments. As my relationship grew with the students at Westinghouse, we would self-disclose personal barriers that seemed to inhibit our success. The students looked up to me as a mentor, and I felt naturally obligated to support them. The parallel process that emerged from the intersection of being African American, and dealing with self-doubt, while trying to graduate may have caused me to be more intentional about the work I do with African American students. Therefore, I had to be cautious and aware that my own racial bias would not affect this study.

I am an African American male school counselor actively engaged in developing and implementing the social-justice informed school counseling group intervention offered by Pittsburgh Westinghouse in collaboration with the Community College of Allegheny County (CCAC). Also, due to the qualitative nature of the study, I was an active participant and used myself as a subjective tool in the Grounded Theory procedure. Finally, I also hold stimulus value by being present in the interview, which could have impacted how participants interacted with me and responded to prompts.

**Data Collection Procedure**

This study aimed to examine the perceived experience of dually enrolled African American Students who participated in the social justice informed school counseling group intervention at Pittsburgh Westinghouse. Eight African American adults participated in the study. The researcher used purposive sampling to find volunteers for the study. Participants for this study had to meet the following requirements: a) participated in the school counseling program intervention while dual-enrolled at Pittsburgh Westinghouse in the fall of 2019, b) be an
African American adult (age 18+), and c) be willing to participate in the study. The researcher reached out to potential participants via Facebook and e-mail. Due to the prior student counselor relationship at Pittsburgh Westinghouse, the researcher already had all of the participant's contact information in possession. Participants partook in 1-hour semi-structured interviews via Zoom video conferencing due to COVID-19 protocols. All interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed via Zoom.

**Participants Profile**

Three male and five female students participated in the study. All the participants were classified as having low socioeconomic status. To maintain the anonymity of the participants, they were asked to choose a pseudonym name. Table 1 provides profiles of the volunteers who participated in the in-depth interviews.

Table 1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pseudonym</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Current Educational Status</th>
<th>Socioeconomic status</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Drago</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>Work ready college program</td>
<td>Low SES</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trevor</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>Full time college student</td>
<td>Low SES</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Miles</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>Full time college student</td>
<td>Low SES</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shanel</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Full time college student</td>
<td>Low SES</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nikki</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Full time college student</td>
<td>Low SES</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kaniya</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Work Force</td>
<td>Low SES</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Becky</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Two Year certification program</td>
<td>Low SES</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sabrina</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Full time college student</td>
<td>Low SES</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Participant 1- "Drago"**

Participant 1, Drago, is a 19-year-old African American male who grew up in Wilkinsburg, a small urban county in the city of Pittsburgh. In 2015, Wilkinsburg High School closed due to low enrollment, and the student enrolled at Pittsburgh Westinghouse. During that
merger, the researcher came to know Drago as his school counselor in the 8th grade. Drago earned a total of 17 college credits before graduating. Upon graduation, Drago was accepted and enrolled in Pittsburgh-based health company, where he works on a rotation with this company as a full-time employee. At the same time, they pay for him to get his degree online through Purdue University. Upon completing the program, he is guaranteed a managerial position within the company as a part of their Diversity Equity and Inclusion Initiatives. He described himself as coming from low socioeconomic status and the first in his family to go to college.

Participant 2 "Trevor"

Participant 2, Trevor, is a 19-year-old African American male who grew up in Homewood, a predominantly African American neighborhood in the city of Pittsburgh. The researcher came to know Trevor in the role of his school counselor when he enrolled at Pittsburgh Westinghouse 9th grade during the second quarter. The Pittsburgh Promise is the organization that paid for Pittsburgh Public School students to participate in the dual enrollment program if they were Pittsburgh public students for the entire duration of their high school career. Since Trevor was not enrolled at Westinghouse at the start of the school year, he was not eligible to receive funding for the classes. However, the Dean of Students at CCAC decided to pay for Trevor to participate as long as he demonstrated academic success. Trevor earned a total of 23 college credits before graduating from Westinghouse. He is currently attending a Pennsylvania state school on a full scholarship. He described himself as coming from low socioeconomic status and the first in his family to go to college.

Participant 3- "Miles"

Participant 3, Miles, is a 19-year-old African American male who grew up in the Homewood area. The researcher came to know miles in the role of his school counselor when he
enrolled at Pittsburgh Westinghouse in 8\textsuperscript{th} grade. Miles earned a total of 23 college credits before graduating from Westinghouse. He described himself as coming from low socioeconomic status. Although he has had two sisters graduate from Westinghouse before him, he is the first in his family to attend a 4-year college. He is currently attending a midsize public University in Pittsburgh on a track scholarship.

\textbf{Participant 4- "Shanel"}

Participant 4, Shanel, is a 19-year-old African American female who grew up in Wilkinsburg. The researcher came to know Shanel during the school merger as her school counselor in the 8\textsuperscript{th} grade. In 10\textsuperscript{th} grade, Shanel had a baby girl whom she brought to school with her every day and would nurse in our daycare. Shanel earned 17 college credits before graduating and was ranked in the top 10 of her senior class. Upon graduation, Shanel enrolled at CCAC to take her pre-requisites for nursing school. She is currently studying to take her TEAS exam and plans to start nursing school in the fall. She also described herself as coming from low socioeconomic status.

\textbf{Participant 5-"Nikki"}

Participant 5, Nikki, is a 19-year-old African American female who grew up in Wilkinsburg and moved to Homewood in the 9\textsuperscript{th} grade. The researcher came to know Nikki during the school merger as her school counselor in the 8\textsuperscript{th} grade. Nikki earned 17 college credits before graduating and was ranked in the top five of her senior class. Nikki attended a midsize Private University in Pittsburgh on a full scholarship upon graduation. However, after completing her first year, she plans to withdraw from the university and follow her passion for cosmetology. Nikki is the youngest of 11 siblings, of whom only one has ever enrolled in a 4-year college. She described herself as coming from low socioeconomic status.
Participant 6 "Kaniya"

Participant 6, Kaniya, is a 19-year-old African American female who grew up in Wilkinsburg. The researcher came to know Kaniya during the school merger as her school counselor in the 8th grade. Kaniya earned 20 college credits before graduating and was ranked in the top five of her senior class. Although Kaniya received several college acceptances and complete scholarship offers, she decided to take a gap year in her education before deciding what to do. She also described herself as coming from low socioeconomic status.

Participant 7 "Becky"

Participant 7, Becky, is a 19-year-old African American female who grew up in Wilkinsburg. The researcher came to know Becky in the role of her school counselor when she started at Westinghouse in the 9th grade. Becky earned a total of 14 college credits before graduating. Becky entered the workforce after graduation as financial gain was an immediate priority. She is currently enrolled at Beauty School in Pittsburgh and will receive her cosmetology license in 2022. She also described herself as coming from low socioeconomic status, and no one in her family has received a college degree.

Participant 8 "Sabrina"

Participant 8, Sabrina, is a 19-year-old African American female who grew up in East Hills, a small urban neighborhood in Pittsburgh. The researcher came to know Sabrina in the role of her school counselor when she started at Westinghouse in the 8th grade. Sabrina earned a total of 22 college credits before graduating. Currently, she goes to a large Public University in Pennsylvania on a scholarship. She described herself as coming from low socioeconomic status and the first in her family to go to college.
**Theoretical Sampling**

The researcher continued close examination of the transcripts and open coding and constant comparison through the five interviews and had begun to think about categories by the third interview. As the fifth interview was completed, a response from three additional participants. Throughout the axial and selective coding processes, theoretical sampling took place. After the third interview, theoretical sampling began to give meaning to the emerging data. Memos were used to ground the analysis in the data. Finally, a thematic saturation analysis was conducted as the themes and categories emerged from the data. Data saturation was reached after the sixth interview. However, interviews continued to clarify emerging themes further. After eight interviews, data saturation was reached as no new, unexplained concepts or themes emerged.

**Data Analysis Procedure**

In grounded theory research, the data analysis process starts during data collection, then involves the three stages of coding: (a) open coding, (b) axial coding, and (c) selective coding and the constant comparison between data and data, data and concepts, concept and data, and between concepts.

Using constant comparative analysis involves a constant comparison of the data verbatim, including words, sentences, paragraphs, and the codes and categories that emerge. Constant comparative analysis is an iterative and recursive process throughout the data collection and each interview. The constant comparative method is a key feature of a grounded theory study (Bluff, 2005).
Open Coding

First, open coding of the data was conducted, resulting in 35 codes or indicators. This phase began with collecting indicators— that is, words, phrases, sentences from the data, or observation. The researcher continually asked questions about what was and was not understood. Finally, after completing each interview, member checking was conducted with each participant to ensure it was understood correctly. In Table 2, provides an extensive list of indicators collected from the eight interviews.

Table 2

*List of Initial Indicators and Concepts from Interviews*
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Positive Aspects</th>
<th>Negative Aspects</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A chance</td>
<td>Feeling targeted</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Opportunity</td>
<td>Not enough staff to help</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Change negative reputation</td>
<td>Lessons on personal growth reduce anxiety</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seeking more in your future</td>
<td>Supportive peers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>College benefits</td>
<td>Proud to advocate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Confidence from advocacy</td>
<td>Work on tasks together in groups</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Experience college</td>
<td>Opportunity to advance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>College affordable encouraging</td>
<td>College readiness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Comfortable sharing with school counselor</td>
<td>Installing hope and seeing the future self-growth</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Group intervention</td>
<td>Destigmatize negative reputation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prepared</td>
<td>Group intervention</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lessons were broken down</td>
<td>Dispelling the myths</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social responsibility</td>
<td>Empowered to advocate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Motivation</td>
<td>Lowered anxiety</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Supportive school counselor</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Flexibility and contextual curriculum</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Supportive adults</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-Confidence</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social responsibility</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ending negative stereotypes</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Group intervention</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feeling like a college student</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Busy schedule</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Difficult work</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stress</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not motivated</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Discrimination</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unsupportive adults</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Time to complete work</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gaining clarity on college expectations</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Able to focus</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trusted</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trusted counselors</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>African American authority figures</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dual enrollment schedule</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of motivation</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Overwhelmed</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Responsibilities</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unsafe commute</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Topics from Friday group intervention</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trust</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mentally prepared</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Memo writing. Memo writing is an essential part of the open coding process. Memo writing intends to interrupt the process with reflection and probing to question the concept's efficacy. Following member checking, memos were written on the data to ground the analysis in the data. After completing the second interview, memos were used to define patterns in the data to facilitate the comparison and questioning process of the two data sets. The researcher continued to go back and forth to make a comparative analysis between all the data sets after each interview was completed. Table 3, provides an example of a conceptual memo.

Table 3
Case and Conceptual Memo

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>What did it mean to have an opportunity to dual-enrolled at Westinghouse?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><em>Ever since Wilkinsburg merged with Westinghouse, everyone just thought we would fail. Then we had this big dual enrollment opportunity to show people Homewood and Wilkinsburg students can get along, that we can learn in a safe environment, and we were smart. Just because we came from different places didn't mean we couldn't get along. We all asked each other for help. We all helped each other because we all wanted to be successful and get these college credits at the end of the day.</em></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Memo: The participant believed everyone expected the school merger to fail because the students were from separate neighborhoods that did not get along. I remember the staff at the schools and community members saying that it was a bad idea. Most Black people in Pittsburgh are family, so I’m not sure what the misconception is. The participant was proud to be able to prove everyone wrong. Students from the opposing neighborhoods worked together to reach a common goal.
From Theme to Categories

Next, axial coding was conducted, resulting in 17 themes. The codes were linked to form categories allowing conceptual patterns to emerge. The relationships between concepts at this stage were verified by constant comparison to the raw data. Memos were used to facilitate the constant comparative analysis. From the concepts and indicators, a rudimentary set of 17 concepts were drafted to begin the process of analyzing and breaking them down into properties:

- College & career readiness
- Racial Justice
- Building community trust & changing the narrative
- Building self-confidence
- The supportive school counseling program
- First-hand experience in a college setting
- Conducive learning environment
- Having role models and inspirational authority figure
- Having classes offered during the school day
- Microaggression during commute
- Multiple responsibilities
- Lack of self-efficacy for vigorous coursework
- Cultural relevant lesson
- Social emotional learning
• Microaggression from some of the school community

• Group cohesiveness

• Student Agency

The purpose of identifying themes was to generate categories. This list appeared to need much work in both grouping concepts and in breaking down concepts to allow the data to generate a set of categories that would be at a similar level of abstractness and be capable of containing the most important or most distributed indicators (Strauss, 1967). The process of analyzing concepts in selective coding confirmed many of the identified indicators and led to new properties. This set of concepts was characterized by some overlap and gaps that demonstrated the need for analysis and re-grouping into six categories.

The following section provides a processual narration for the first coding phase for each of the 17 themes, examining and analyzing the indicators initially clustered with each theme. The process is impossible to describe with 100% accuracy since the axial coding phase overlaps the open coding phase.

**Theme 1: College and career readiness**

This study was designed to generate an understanding of the dually enrolled African American Students' perception of dual enrollment and to generate a useful definition. This analysis of "College and Career Readiness" as a concept covers the range of properties from "a way for college experience," "earning better education," to "earning college credits."

Understandably, the concept of college and career readiness is the messiest of all indicators. The researcher found competing terms that are at roughly the same level of abstraction as college and career readiness and indicators that signify the conceptual meaning of dual enrolment. One participant, Sabrina, made the following comment regarding her view of dual enrolment:
I came to college with 22 college credits. 18 of them were from Westinghouse so it's really cool. But if I would have gone to any other school in our district, I'm pretty sure I wouldn't have had the opportunity to get this many credits.

Trever made a statement echoed by others about dual enrollment as a means to go to college. He stated:

To me, dual enrollment means I want to do something after high school rather than just work a job forever like Mcdonald's. So just so be able to have an opportunity to stand out and have a career. Now, being in college, I get to actually see that it was beneficial, because my first semester here I took a math and English class, and other than that I've just been taking art classes. I only had to take 2 actual core classes, because I took most of them ahead of time. So, it saved me a lot of time. And I feel like it might help grow my art skills because I'm like taking all my art classes together. -Trevor, Interview

Kaniya mentioned that the dual enrollment program is a means to get an opportunity that wouldn't be provide otherwise for him. She stated:

To have an opportunity that probably a lot of other people didn't have growing up like our parents and staff. An experience to get ahead of the game by getting college credits. And take advanced classes we couldn't take in high school. A better education. - Kaniya, Interview
Theme 2: Racial justice

The following participants describe dual enrollment as an opportunity to get ahead that they were not typically afforded to be as African Americans:

*A chance to get ahead of the curve. A chance to see what college is like and be a part of a college environment. A chance to get ahead of the game.* - Drago, Interview 1

*An opportunity to stick out more and show that if somebody from my area wants to do something, it's okay.* - Trevor, Interview 2

*It's like a bigger opportunity to do like more than what we usually had. More classes and events. Stuff for college. We didn't have those kinds of opportunities before. Some people treated us differently. But you gave us so many opportunities to get college credit and programs to be able to graduate high school. No other school was doing that.* - Shanel, Interview 4

Theme 3: Building community trust & changing the narrative.

All participants indicated that dual enrollment provided them an opportunity for racial justice. In addition, participants indicated that dual enrollment provided opportunities to position yourself to get ahead despite the negative reputation the school receives. Being a student at Westinghouse was associated with several negative stereotypes, such as poor education, gang violence, and the thought that people from the neighborhood do not care about education. Being dual-enrolled allowed participants to change that narrative by demonstrating to the community that they were intelligent enough to complete college classes in high school and accomplish goals by working together despite the neighborhood they were from. These accomplishments helped boost the participants' self-confidence:
Ever since Wilkinsburg merged with Westinghouse, everyone just thought we would fail. Then we had this big dual enrollment opportunity to show people Homewood and Wilkinsburg students can get along, that we can learn in a safe environment, and we were smart. Just because we came from different places didn't mean we couldn't get along. We all asked each other for help. We all helped each other because we all wanted to be successful and get these college credits at the end of the day. -Drago, Interview 1

Westinghouse itself is like labeled as a bad school. You know that. Being at Westinghouse and going to CCAC dual-enrolled meant a lot because it showed them that Westinghouse can have smart students and students who want to do something with their lives and want to learn. It was a good experience. They say we're the ghetto school, all the kids are bad. But it's not even that bad. Nikki-, Interview 5

People like to talk a lot of stuff about Westinghouse, about Pittsburgh Public Schools in general. Say we don't learn anything; we don't know what's going on in the real world, and we don't have opportunities. This showed that we do. We had the same experience any other student would have, if not better. Students in other districts didn't even have this opportunity. Well, people I know didn't have it. We were set up for success. -Kaniya, Interview 6

Dual enrollment means bigger opportunities. College credits, being able to leave school, and experience college in high school, test our abilities. Some people think we
can't do these things because we are from Westinghouse. They think we're dumb. We're not; we work harder than anyone else just to have a chance. -Shanel, Interview 4

**Theme 4: Building self-confidence.**

The theme of feeling good or self-confidence was raised several times throughout the participant's interviews. This confidence came from being able to complete dual enrollment courses, having security knowing people still care to provide such opportunities, and being able to dispel the negative stereotypes that come with going to Westinghouse:

> Well, as an African American, it gave me the sense of people, are still trying to look out for people like me. It gave me more confidence on wanting to do things because I know someone cares. I know that someone else is still looking out even though my skin color, which is always a problem or barrier to most people. -Trevor, Interview 1

> Being dual enrolled meant a lot. You know how they do Westinghouse. They think we're the lowest of the low. It really boosted our confidence. I have a lot of friends that don't go to Westinghouse, every time I bring up the school, they have something bad to say. "We bring guns to school, smoke in the bathrooms, and fight every day." It isn't true. I dealt with it in high school and even now in college. -Miles, Interview 3

> It felt good! I loved being at Westinghouse doing stuff. People looked at us differently because we go to a school in the hood. They think we can't do things White students can, but we had the chance to do better than other schools. -Shanel, Interview 4
Theme 5: The supportive school counseling program

Participants indicated that the school counseling program was supportive of their success, from preparing themselves for dual enrollment to completion of the program. They described that school counselors' support and care were motivational to persevere and work diligently. Some of this motivation was provided by the school counselor, who allowed the students to participate in the dual enrollment program and believed in the students' ability to be successful:

*Motivation and drive to keep going. Getting college credits kept me going. And being in college now helps me because I already had a feel for it.* -Trevor, Interview 2

*You, Mr. Hanner, our school counselor. You were a big part of it. I knew you would keep us motivated and not let us give up. You were a big part of why I thought I could do it. You always believed in us, so I felt we could do it.* -Shanel, Interview 4

*I felt like I just needed motivation. That's the main thing, because I know I can do the work. I'm not lazy, but I just don't have much motivation to do like school stuff. But if I had the motivation to, I could because I know that I'm smart, and I know the work is not impossible. I just don't like doing schoolwork.* -Nikki, Interview 5

Theme 6: First-hand experience in a college setting

Taking classes on the college campus versus Westinghouse allows participants to understand college expectations. Participants described their previous perception of college expectations as unfavorable due to myths they believe to be true about what it is like to be a
college student. Participating in dual enrollment granted students first-hand experience, allowing them to break the myths:

*It taught us how professors would grade and even act. Teachers in high school would say that college professors aren't going to care, and it will be harder. And college professors won't put up with no bull. Things are going to be so different. They don't let you turn stuff in late. It wasn't as bad as they made it seem. We needed to experience that for ourselves. They had patience with us and treated us fairly.* - Becky, Interview 7

*A lot of my teachers at Westinghouse always talked about if you turned in an assignment late, professors wouldn't accept it. That hasn't been my experience here at school. Professors actually work with you. The schedule helps too. We had classes four days a week, and they were not back-to-back, so we had time to get our work done. Versus in high school, we got work every day, and it was always due the next day, which was stressful. My schedule is actually the same now in college. Taking class at CCAC there made us feel like adults.* - Miles, Interview 3

*You get to be in the actual college class, and you get to feel for it, like if you're deciding whether or not you want to go to college. You get to see it without committing to it or being there just there while you're still in high school, and you still get the credits while being there.* – Nikki, Interview 5

The participants were also enrolled in a College in High school class through the University of Pittsburgh. A trained teacher taught an advanced class for college credit at
Westinghouse through this program. Even though they receive college credit for taking the class, participants found the workload and instruction discouraging compared to the classes they took at CCAC:

*I feel like we got to learn at our own pace at CCAC instead of just having stuff thrown at us. The College and High class, we just had a lot of work thrown at us with the expectation to get it done. We would do it but didn't really learn from it. And then on to the next subject the next day. At CCAC, we would really learn about something in detail for 2-3 classes. It gave us more time to understand it and do assignments because the work wasn't due the next day. We always had a break before the next class. The pace was just better. Drago- Interview 1*

**Theme 7: Conducive learning environment in a college setting**

Participants indicated that taking classes at CCAC instead of Westinghouse was more conducive to learning. At Westinghouse, participants sometimes found it difficult to focus due to the disruptive school environment. Taking classes at the college campus influenced the participants to take learning more seriously and allowed them to focus:

*At Westinghouse, I would procrastinate and sometimes not take it seriously. At CCAC, it was like; this is college; I have to do this for real. -Kaniya, Interview 6*

*We were really learning. At Westinghouse, we were still in the classroom, you could hear all the kids outside being loud, and they were a distraction. We needed that change in the environment. To be taken out and put in a new one. It gave us the whole*
college experience. We had to get out of the building; it played a good part in it. -Nikki, Interview 5

**Theme 8: Having role models and inspirational figures**

Participants indicated that having role models and inspirational figures served as protective factors for their success. In addition, they provided them with opportunities and resources to advance their education. Participants indicated these role models were the reasons they participated in dual enrollment:

*We had people to go to. We had our group. If not, then Mr. Hanner, our school counselor; if not you, then the other school counselor, Mr. Morris. We had outlets to get information and help. We eventually got computers, so just having resources helped us a lot.* -Drago, Interview 1

*Mr. Hanner, our school counselor, helped us be successful. He made sure we got everything we needed. He helped us get transportation when nobody wanted to listen to us. You made sure we got there if we didn't have a ride or just didn't feel like going. He kept us motivated and didn't let us quit. If we were struggling in a class, he would help. He talked to our professors and taught us how to talk to them as professionals. He was there, supporting.* -Shanel, Interview 4

*Mr. Hanner, our school counselor, honestly. He was the only person that motivated us, and that's why we did it. Every time we did anything at school was because of you. You always gave us opportunities. In the class we did with you on Fridays, where we talked about our goals and met every week, you gave us time to do homework which*
played a big part because it was time for us to be together and do what we needed to do and prepare for class the following week. - Nikki, Interview 5

Mr. Hanner and Mr. Morris cared and supported us. The counselors cared more about us than any other teacher. But once we did good and got recognized for what we did, they wanted to be apart to make them seem like they were always apart, for their own reputation. It wasn't real. Oh, Ms. Dixon and Ms. Thompson, ya'll give us support. Ya'll make sure we got everything we needed. Ya'll teach us stuff we didn't know or know we needed to know. Ya'll helped us get jobs, and yall took all the crap just to make sure we were successful. Y'all did that for us. - Shanel, Interview 4

The participants also recognized the mentorship of the Dean of Students at CCAC as a protective factor for their success in dual enrollment. Being an African American male in a high position of authority, the dean provided the students with a sense of vicarious self-efficacy. The Dean visited the students at Westinghouse when we designed the dual enrollment collaborative with CCAC. The participants also felt he genuinely cared about them when he let the participants know he would serve as their direct contact while on campus, he believed in their ability the succeed, personally gave the participants a tour of the campus, and even paid for students to participate if they were not eligible to received funding through the Pittsburgh Promise:

I thought he was cool. He came with a nice suit on and was representing us because he was a Black man and we're Black. As Black young people talking to the Dean, that was big. He's a Dean as a Black man, wow! It was inspirational. He showed us a good example of what we could be. And he actually cared because he paid for some of the students to participate in the program. - Sabrina, Interview 8
He made us feel special. Like he picked us out to do this and believed in us. He came to our school, Westinghouse. The school with the bad name. He paid me to take classes because I have good grades and didn't even know him. -Trevor, Interview 2

I feel like he was very helpful because I feel like he believed in us more than we believed in ourselves. He would say I know ya'll do it; I believe n ya'll. From the jump, he showed us, love. Like, I'ma take ya'll here, show ya'll it's not that hard. Again, it was more motivation; everyone believed we could do it. -Nikki, Interview 5

**Theme 9: Convenient schedule**

Participants indicated that having classes during the day served as a protective factor. In the past, dual enrollment courses were offered after school, which was seen as a detriment for participating in dual enrollment because they had other responsibilities to attend to. They also liked being the freedom that came with being treated like an adult when leaving the school to go to class:

*I probably wouldn't have done the classes after school because of sports and other activities. -Miles, Interview 3*

*It's easier because who has time after school. Like, I had cheer practice and went to an afterschool program. Anything additional, I wouldn't have time to live. -Sabrina, Interview 8*
Theme 10: Microaggression during the commute

The data indicate racial bias African American students face simply because of the neighborhood and school they attend. Fortunately, having an opportunity to advocate for a need can result in the school providing students with transportation. During the presentation, participants also had a chance to advocate for what they needed, such as additional resources such as transportation, and why it was necessary:

White people would scream at us, beep their horns at us, and call us rachet and ghetto because we were supposed to be in school. Meanwhile, we were going to college. It's just weird. Like, you don't even know us, and we're kids. And it's all because it's Homewood. People see a group of kids and just assume we're not doing anything positive. I'm trying to better myself and get an education, but you're screaming at us and putting us down.

I didn't like walking, but it was ok since we were going to college. Oh, but one day we were walking to classes, this White man drove past and said some words to us, stuck up his middle finger, and drove off. We were just shocked and mad, but then again we just laughed to laugh it off. It was crazy. I was really just in shock. He called us junkies or something. I was just stuck like, "What?"-Becky, Interview, 7

Theme 11: Multiple responsibilities

This theme highlights the multiple responsibilities participants had to deal with when choosing dual enrollment. These responsibilities included a range of extracurricular activities, jobs, and responsibilities at home that they felt were priorities:
I have a daughter, and I had to get her after school. I wouldn't have been able to participate if it was after school. Just like they have CTE programs where you can do nursing for 3 hours in school, we should have that same opportunity. We would have also been stressed trying to take classes after school with on top on schoolwork. - Shanel, Interview 4

We had jobs, we had to support ourselves, and we wouldn't have time to do this after school. Half the kids wouldn't have participated in the program. – Becky- Interview 7

**Theme 12: Lack of self-efficacy for vigorous coursework**

This theme highlights how the participants perceived college work as difficult and overwhelming. The fear of failure discouraged participants from wanting to participate in the dual enrollment program. Participants did not believe the education at Westinghouse prepared them to succeed in a college course. Also, due to the other responsibilities students prioritized, students felt the additional rigor of taking a college course in high school would be overwhelming, causing unwanted stress:

*I heard college is a lot of work. Going to Westinghouse, I didn't know if I was prepared for work to get harder. I just didn't want to try and mess up. -Sabrina, Interview 8.*

*Its college in high school. We already get enough work so we thought we would have tons more, and it would be hard. - Shanel, Interview 4*
Not wanting to be stressed out because we already have a lot to do. It can also be laziness too; it's a real thing. And procrastinating. And I think people do it more when they have a lot going on and feel overwhelmed. -Kaniya, Interview 6

Being in 11th grade and going to college? Of course, I thought it would be too hard. I thought I was going to fail. You gonna think of something negative. Becky, Interview 7

Theme 13: Culturally relevant lessons

Participants indicated that the group interventions were very encouraging and kept them motivated. They highlighted the instructor's ability to adjust and provide them with support for specific needs and feel comfortable openly discussing problems they were dealing with because of the nature of the counselor-student relationship. Participants highlighted that participating in the group was just as crucial to their success as the other classes they were enrolled in:

They were very encouraging. Especially doing the presentation at the end. You just kept us motivated and thinking about getting those credits at the end. I just appreciated the encouragement. You being our school counselor, we were just comfortable. You weren't judgmental, more of a problem solver. You would help us break things down, we worked on our problems out loud, and you would write stuff on the board. You taught us about breaking down papers and making sure we didn't plagiarize. It was a lot of good pointers and advice. And when we had a lot going on like big exams and schoolwork, you let us have time to relax and mentally prepare for the next week. -Drago, Interview 1
I learned more stuff than I knew. It helped me prepare. Just like the other classes, it was just as important. It was more personal. Mr. Hanner always puts his students first, so you made us feel comfortable. You weren't a stranger. You were able to talk about personal things because it was you. And we needed that. You were the person who helped me since the first day of 9th grade. So, I knew if anyone could help me, it was you. I trusted you. You helped me be successful in high school. -Sabrina, Interview 8

The class was very helpful because it gave us time to do what we needed as a group. We were able to talk about what we were doing, what we were studying, and what we had to turn in for the other classes before next Monday. The class prevented things from getting overwhelming because we knew we had it. -Nikki, Interview 5

**Theme 14: Social-emotional learning.**

Participants indicated that the social-emotional learning lessons were beneficial in supporting them. Several of the lessons made them self-aware of bad habits that were harmful to their self-efficacy. The participants recalled the lessons, emphasized how they were delivered, and still apply them to their daily lives:

To be self-determined. You always said you could only help us so much that we needed to want it ourselves. You can lead a horse to water, but you can't make it drink. You gave us the resources, but you taught us we had to be motivated to see it through. You taught us little things like putting our pride to the side and asking for help. Taught us to take advantage of opportunities. -Drago, Interview 1
Umm, I can't remember what lesson it was, but we worked together to make that chart on the board about our strengths and some other stuff. It was fun. I think it was growth and fixed mindsets. It really helped me open my mind because I was like, damn, I really have a fixed mindset. I gotta get it together. -Nikki, Interview 5

Friday's class was the time we talked most in the, and everything was personal. A lot of group activities. I used some of the lessons about motivation in college now. So, I didn't come to college feeling scared or not ready. I knew what to expect. -Sabrina, Interview 8

I like Friday's class. I liked being able to talk about stuff we were going through during the week. I like how they went. I liked when we did that lesson on grit. That didn't just help me out with classes, but it helped me out with life. Because I definitely had a fixed mindset. And those lessons helped me with life. Even now in college. -Miles, Interview 3

**Theme 15: Microaggression from some of the school community**

Several participants indicated feeling like some of the school staff were targeting them. They repeatedly mentioned feeling hated and that people wanted to see their downfall. Eventually, they were labeled the "dual enrollment kids," which seemed to carry a negative connotation. They indicated anger because they were trying to do something productive in the school but seemed to get more backlash. They also indicated school personnel eliminating programs they felt were beneficial without the student's input or consideration:
No, changes to the program. I thought it was great. Other than the people who would hate on us. I feel like certain adults just wanted our downfall. I feel like people particularly targeted our friend group. It was always the dual enrollment kids. They complained and complained about nothing. They would tell on us for doing anything and make it seem like it was a bigger issue than it was. Or they would try to stop programs we did that were making a good impression on Westinghouse. Some wanted us to fail; few wanted to see us succeed. -Chanel, Interview 4

Have more people to help. Staff that cared. You were the only one doing it and already had a lot on your plate. And people didn't take us seriously. Or the school counselor is serious. No one wanted to put into the program and help. Or believed we could do it. They wanted us to fail. -Sabrina, Interview 8

Theme 16: Building group cohesiveness among the cohort

The students who participated in the dual enrollment program took their classes in a cohort. A cohort model is often used in educational settings to help students reach a common goal. Participants in this study indicated that working as a group was very supportive. The group intervention brought participants together as they worked toward a common goal. They would work on assignments together and felt a sense of social responsibility to ensure everyone was successful. The group cohesiveness helped lower the participants' anxiety, making navigating the college campus and curriculum easier. The group brought the participants together and served as a primary source of support:
Working as a cohort made students feel comfortable asking questions. It helped because we all got the same assignments, same homework, and same exams so we would be able to help each other. We could do things in groups and study for exams. Just coming together helped us get things done. - Drago, Interview 1

I feel like it was a good idea because we were already like comfortable with each other. So it's like when you go to like being on campus like your first day on like actually being on campus, you're not gonna be like talkative you're not used to people. So you're not gonna be open enough to speak to someone in a new setting. So, but not all in like the same classroom, but in a different building. It felt normal because we had all we see each other's spaces before and talked to each other. - Trevor, Interview 2

I think it was good because we all know each other, all help each other, we all motivate each other, we all together as a team. We helped each other. If the professor didn't explain it right, our classmates would break it down easier. – Shanel, Interview 4

It was nice. At least there wasn't anyone we didn't know or feel uncomfortable with. I could be myself in an environment I was used to. It was like being in school. Eventually, we had classes with other people, but us as high school kids, we just wanted to be kids and not have to worry about what others thought. - Becky, Interview
Theme 17: Student agency

As a final assignment for the group intervention, the participants did an advocacy presentation about their experience participating in the dual enrollment program at Westinghouse. The students did this presentation in front of the Pittsburgh Public Schools administrators and CCAC administrators, and it was also open to the community. Participants took pride in designing the presentation and demonstrating what they accomplished over the semester, along with the opportunity to advocate for more resources. Also, it highlights how adverse events such as racism can be looked over and silenced because of the negative connotation they carry. Finally, participants indicated the boost in confidence and empowerment that came with advocating for something they believed was necessary. This was so important to some participants that they wanted to participate in the presentation despite being nervous and also felt they should have more opportunities to do this type of work alongside their academic curriculum:

We got harassed while we were walking to classes. Some people told us to keep that part out the presentation because it's bad, but the school counselor Mr. Hanner told us to keep it in. We still got to say it and it was honest. After the presentation, we were able to get transportation from the school to get to the campus. -Nikki, Interview

It gave me confidence on and talking to people and doing this interview right now. It gave me more confidence to be able to speak out in front of people. I feel confident with staring at me and no longer feel awkward about it anymore. It was my first time doing an actual presentation about something I cared about. So, like a regular high school science project. You do a presentation about like planets and stuff like that. It's
like something you were forced to do. But having the opportunity to tell people about what we did, how we did it and what we achieved is important. It felt good to show I did something being from Westinghouse. -Trevor, Interview 2

I like talking and giving people information on what they don't know. It was needed. It felt good because we gave people information about what they think they know about our school but don't. Plus, I never did anything like that before. I don't think none of us have. And we were speaking in front of other adults and people in the community. It set us up to talk to people about the real world. Not just your classmates about a science project. We talked about real stuff, they might not want to hear it but we had to try our best and try. -Kaniya, Interview 6

Identification of Emerging Categories and Selective Coding

Finally, selective coding was conducted, and six categories emerged. This process integrated and refined the major categories from the data (Bluff, 2005; Charmaz; 1996; Kolb, 2012; Strauss & Corbin, 1997). Categorization involves inductive building up from facts-the data, identifying indicators and concepts, and grouping themes into categories of greater abstraction. As the researcher worked through the selective coding, six categories emerged from the process:

1. Reconceptualizing Dual enrollment - conceptual and cultural context (what)
2. Factors Supporting Dual Enrolled students - Positive countering events- (the how)
3. Determinant circumstance - Risk factors (consequence)
4. Social justice informed group intervention Significance - contributing factors (what
5. Needs for improvement of social justice informed group intervention - elements need to reassess (what and when)

6. The outcome of social justice informed group intervention - Deliverability (measurable outcome indicator)

Reconceptualizing Dual Enrollment and defining Dual Enrollment

This category corresponds with research question 1 - **What does dual enrollment mean to African American students?** The participants in this study define dual enrollment both conceptually and contextually. Conceptually, they view dual enrollment as an opportunity to increase their college and career readiness. Contextually, participants defined dual enrollment as an opportunity for racial justice, building community trust & changing the narrative, and influence in building self-confidence.

Contextual Definition: the meaning of dual enrolment in the context of the participants of this study involves more cultural and situational understanding. Dual enrollment provided them with a college and career readiness opportunity that they typically are not afforded. Every participant identified that having the opportunity to participate in dual enrollment, oppose the negative stereotypes, and achieve academic success while attending Westinghouse, increased their self-efficacy and gave them hope for future growth.

Factors Supporting Dual Enrolled students

This category corresponds with research question 2 (a) **What are the protective factors for the academic experience of dually enrolled African American students?** The themes in this category highlight protective factors that may encourage African American students to participate in dual enrollment programs and support them. Participants identified the school
counseling program as supportive. Notably, the participants indicated that the school counselor kept them motivated, would not let them give up, and always provided them with opportunities. Participants also indicated that the first-hand experience of taking classes in a college setting served as a protective factor. Taking classes on campus made participants feel like real college students. It also allowed them to dispel myths about the college they thought were true and discouraged them from wanting to go to college. Taking classes on campus also provided participants with a conducive learning environment. This allowed participants to focus on their work without the behavioral distractions they dealt with at a Westinghouse. Finally, participants identified having a role model and inspirational authority figures as protective factors for dual enrollment. Participants indicated that trusted relationships they built with the school counselors, the African American school staff, and the Dean of Students from CCAC kept them motivated, empowered them through affirmation, and made them feel special because they genuinely cared about them as students.

**Risk Factors for Dual Enrollment Participation**

This category corresponds to the inverse of the research question 2(b) - *What are the risk factors/barriers to the academic experience of dually enrolled African American students?* This category includes the following themes: Microaggressions during commute, Lack of self-efficacy for vigorous coursework, and Multiple responsibilities. The themes presented in this category highlight risk factors that may discourage African Americans students from participating in dual enrollment programs. The participants perceived them as stressors that may cause them to feel overwhelmed.
Significance of Social Justice Informed Group Intervention

This category corresponds to research question 3- How is a social justice-informed school counseling approach supportive of African American students during dual enrollment? Specifically, sub-question- a. **What aspects of the social justice-informed school counseling approach help support African American students' dual enrollment?** As a requirement for the dual enrollment program, the students participated in a group intervention that the school counselor led once a week for 15 weeks. The purpose of the reflective group was to support participants while they were dual enrolled through psychoeducational lessons. This category indicated the following themes: culturally relevant lessons and social-emotional learning.

Needs for Improvement of Social Justice Informed Group Intervention

This category corresponds to research question 3(b)- **What aspects of the social justice-informed school counseling approach do students want to change to enhance their experience in dual enrollment?** The only theme that arose in this category was: microaggressions from school community. Participants described unsupportive adults who seemed to target them as a negative experience during the program.

The Outcome of Social justice Informed Group Intervention

This category corresponds to research question 3( c) - **How does participation in a social justice-informed school counseling program facilitate the success of dually enrolled African American students?** The themes that arose in this category were: Building group cohesiveness among the cohort and student agency.
Cross Case Analysis of Themes

In this section, the researcher provides a cross-case analysis of themes, similarities, and differences in the table below. First, some of the findings emphasize the contexts of dual enrollment related to the experience of African American high school students. Second, some of the findings emphasize protective factors that support academic engagement and college readiness of dually enrolled African American Students. Third, some findings emphasize barriers in low-income schools' social and physical environments. Finally, some of the findings emphasize protective factors that support academic engagement and college readiness of dually enrolled African American Students.

Table 2

_Cross-Case Analysis of Themes, Similarity, and Difference_

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<th>Categories</th>
<th>Themes, Similarity, and Differences</th>
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<tr>
<td>Reconceptualizing and Defining Dual Enrollment</td>
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<td>Protective Factors</td>
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<td>• First-hand experience in college setting</td>
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• Having a role model and inspirational authority figures
• Convenient scheduling

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<td>• Multiple responsibilities</td>
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<td>• Lack of self-efficacy for vigorous coursework</td>
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<td>• Group cohesiveness</td>
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**Chapter Summary**

This chapter aimed to present the findings and highlight the categories and themes that emerged from the data in the present study. The participants' demographic information and pertinent characteristics were outlined. A brief outline of the analysis procedures and a diagrammatic audit trail was provided. Then, the findings were presented as grouped by the major categories that emerged from the data and the final model. The first category is factored in as reconceptualizing and defining dual enrollment and includes the following themes: College & career readiness, racial justice, building community trust & changing the narrative, and building self-confidence. The second category is factored in supporting dual enrollment and includes the
following themes: supportive school counseling program, first-hand experience in a college setting, conducive learning environment, having role models and inspirational authority figures, and having classes offered during the school day. The third category that emerged from the data is risk factors and included the following themes: microaggression during commute, multiple responsibilities, and lack of self-efficacy for vigorous coursework. The fourth category that emerged from the data was the significance of social justice-informed group intervention, and the following themes emerged: culturally relevant lessons and social-emotional learning. The fifth category that emerged from the data was the need to improve the social justice informed program, and the following theme emerged: microaggressions from some of the school community. The sixth and final category that emerged from the data was the outcome of social justice group intervention, and the following themes emerged: group cohesiveness and student agency. The next chapter provides the implications of these results and conclusions about the conceptual model.
CHAPTER V: Discussion

This study was designed to explore the perception of dually enrolled African American Students who participated in the social-justice informed school counseling group intervention at Pittsburgh Westinghouse in order to generate a substantive grounded theory of social-justice informed school counseling program that promotes African American student's success in dual enrollment program and to provide educators valuable insight they can use to promote the equity, and academic achievement of dual-enrolled African American students. The primary research consisted of eight in-depth interviews with experienced dual-enrolled African American students from Pittsburgh Westinghouse, a school district in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. The qualitative study's design is based upon Corbin and Strauss's (2008) grounded theory, Ladson-Billings (1995) critical race theory in education, Solórzano, D. G., & Yosso's (2002) counter-narrative storytelling model, and the active interviewing model.

This chapter reviews the research questions and what has been learned. Then, it reviews the categories that emerged from the interview study, discusses the relationship among those categories compared to the current literature, and presents the substantive conceptional model to promote dual-enrolled African American students' academic success and equity. Finally, the chapter evaluates the validity and assessment of the significance of the finding and recommendations for future research.

What was Learned

Participants gained their voices by telling their educational journey stories during a semi-structured interview. Consistent with the statement of the problem and the purpose of this study, three questions drove the research:
1. What does dual enrollment mean to African American students?

2. What are the risk and protective factors/barriers to the academic experience of dually enrolled African American students?

3. How is a social justice-informed school counseling approach supportive of African American students during dual enrollment?
   a. What aspects of the social justice-informed school counseling approach help support African American students’ dual enrollment?
   b. What aspects of the social justice-informed school counseling approach do students want to change to enhance their experience in dual enrollment?
   c. How does participation in a social justice-informed school counseling program facilitate the success of dually enrolled African American students?

**Participant Profile**

The participants in this study included eight African American students who participated in the social-justice informed comprehensive school counseling program at Pittsburgh Westinghouse while dual-enrolled at CCAC during the fall of 2019 and achieved academic success. All the participants subscribed to be from low SES communities in the city of Pittsburgh. To maintain the anonymity of the participants, the participants chose pseudonym names for the study. After the semester, all students who participated in the social justice informed comprehensive school counseling intervention. At the same time, dual-enrolled achieved academic success earning a total of seven college credits each and a cumulative 3.2GPA. This was higher than the 2.6GPA the general admitted first-year student had at CCAC.
Not only did we achieve academic success, but Pittsburgh Westinghouse had the most students dual enrolled in the entire School District.

As an African American male school counselor actively engaged in developing and implementing the social-justice informed school counseling group intervention offered by Pittsburgh Westinghouse, I was an active participant. I used myself as a subjective tool in the Grounded Theory procedure. I developed this intervention due to the inequities in college and career readiness at Pittsburgh Westinghouse and the deficit ideologies I uncovered from staff.

Discussion of the Findings

Six categories emerged from the data analysis process that provides insights into how these African American students perceived and experienced the social-justice informed comprehensive school counseling program at Pittsburgh Westinghouse while dual-enrolled at CCAC. It should be known that the categories presented do not describe the experience of all low-class African American students in dual enrollment programs, as there is not one overarching theme of the African American experience. However, the African American students who participated in this study share the same experiences navigating through the dual enrollment program. In this chapter, the researcher elaborates on and discuss the categories that emerged. Grounded theory utilized to discuss a Theory of Establishing a sustainable and equitable dual enrollment program that promotes the academic success of dual-enrolled African American students.

Category 1: Reconceptualizing and Defining Dual Enrollment

This study revealed much about this group of dually enrolled African American students and their perception and understanding of dual enrolment. The common theme that emerged from the eight participants indicated that the program's characteristics do not limit the definition
of dual enrollment; rather, it is more defined based on the significance and the meaning driven by their own situational and contextual aspects. One student in the study, Miles, described dual enrollment as "a way to re-paint the myth and damaging story about them and their community." Most respondents held similar views, citing the pleasant experiences of being enrolled in a dual enrollment program and social justice informed group intervention and taking those classes in a college setting. Participants provide two definitions related to the meaning of dual enrollment. (a) The conceptual definition b) The contextual definition.

Conceptually, participants view dual enrollment as an opportunity to increase their college and career readiness. They said they gained more understanding and clarity about college readiness and what it takes to succeed in life due to their participation in the dual enrollment program. Moreover, they said they were able to have careers versus jobs due to the opportunity dual enrollment provided them. Other participants emphasized how earning college credits in high school for free made college seem affordable when they did not believe it was before. Similarly, College Board defines dual enrollment as an opportunity for high school students to take college-level courses taught by college-approved high school teachers or college faculty for college credit (College Board, 2017). Also, students who gain college credit while earning a high school diploma may be more likely to graduate college on time and at a lower cost. Also, Conley defines college readiness as a multifaceted concept comprising numerous factors internal and external to the classroom environment (Conley, 2008). The authors model key components in cognitive strategies, key content, academic behaviors, and contextual skills and awareness. Although the findings in this study agree with the conceptual definition of dual enrollment in modern research, the model does not consider the impact race and culture have on college readiness as contextually defined by the participants in this study.
One of the most consistent findings in this study was the contextual definition participants gave to dual enrollment. Dual enrollment in the context of the participants involves a more cultural and situation understanding. Contextually, participants defined dual enrollment as an opportunity for racial justice, building community trust & changing the narrative, and influence in building self-confidence.

Participants identified that having the opportunity to participate, advocate, and achieve academic success while dual enrollment courses, specifically while attending Westinghouse, increased their sense of self-confidence. African American students experience discriminatory barriers that hinder successful outcomes (Byrd, 2017; Milner, 2010; Wright et al., 2017). One participant, Trevor, mentioned, “it gave me confidence just knowing someone cared enough to provide me the opportunity despite his skin color.” Here, he acknowledges that he foresees his race as a barrier due to discrimination and expects challenges in his future career development as an African American student from Homewood. Participants also indicated that dual enrollment increased their confidence as it provided them a platform to destigmatize the racial stereotypes about their school and community. Participants disclosed being fully aware that Westinghouse and Homewood's community is known for being a bad school where everyone expects failure. According to Holcomb-McCoy (2007), the legacy of discrimination can plague the community and affect the belief that one cannot succeed. When the children in a community believe society does not expect them to succeed, they do poorly in school. Achieving academic success while dually enrolled at Westinghouse allowed the participants to oppose the negative stereotypes by being recognized for their intelligence. Participating indicated that the dual enrollment program instilled hope for future growth, increasing self-confidence.
Category 2: Factors Supporting Dual Enrollment

Another consistent theme participants highlighted were the protective factors supporting dual enrollment. Participants highlighted protective factors as to why they decided to participate in the dual enrollment program and achieved academic success. In addition, participants identified the motivation and support put in place as a part of the social justice-informed school counseling intervention that led to their success. Participating in college access programs can help African American students prepare for college. According to (Erford, 2019), having proper support increases the likelihood of post-secondary success, self-efficacy toward college and career readiness, awareness to distinguish between high school and post-secondary education, and the ability to self-advocate. As a school counselor, they felt that I kept them motivated, listened to their needs, provided them with opportunities when no one else cared, and knew that I would not let them give up.

Participants indicated several supportive factors of the comprehensive school counseling program that led to their success, such as taking the classes on the college campus. Participants in the study indicated that taking classes on the college campus versus Westinghouse allowed a better understanding of college expectations. Participants described their previous perception of college expectations as unfavorable due to myths they believe to be true about what it is like to be a college student. Participants indicated how taking the classes on the college campus made them feel like real college students. The college environment gave students a sense of accountability to complete coursework and manage their time better. Morgan et al. (2018) indicated that participation in the college level coursework also teaches students critical soft skills for college, such as time management, stress management, and self-care. The college environment made the participants work harder and hold each other accountable. Participants
indicated that having a genuine college experience on a college campus helped dispel negative thoughts that once discouraged them from wanting to dual enroll or go to college. The college environment made it easier to focus as Westinghouse was not always a conducive learning environment due to student distractions. Participants also indicated the dual enrollment schedule as a protective factor for their participation. With the classes taking place during the school day, they could participate. All participants indicated they probably would not have participated in the program if it was after school or on the weekend.

All the participants indicated that having role models and inspirational figures served as protective factors for their success. Role models served as support systems because the participants trusted them, helped keep them motivated, advocated on their behalf, and empowered them through affirmation. They provided them with opportunities and resources to advance their education. Participants indicated that these role models were why they participated in dual enrollment.

**Category 3: Risk Undermining Dual Enrolment**

This theme represents barriers participants in this study encountered that discouraged them from participating in a dual enrollment program or served as an obstacle they had to overcome. Several of the participants in the study indicated they perceived college work as complex. Participants mentioned that the fear of failure would cause them to become overwhelmed and develop added stress they did not want to deal with. Some participants said that fear of failure stems from not feeling like Westinghouse prepared them to succeed in rigorous coursework. Several participants in this study indicated multiple responsibilities that would have priority over dual enrollment. These responsibilities also made them feel like they would not have the time to put enough effort into a college course and achieve academic success
Participants also indicated experiencing microaggressions from White people driving past during the commute to campus. Offenders would yell racial and demeaning slurs at them because they should have been in school. Meanwhile, they were going to take college classes in high school. African American students also experience racial microaggressions grounded in assumptions of intellectual inferiority and criminality (Aqueel Raheem & Hart, 2019). These encounters can result in racial trauma (also known as race-based trauma), which is a psychological response to experiences of racial discrimination, including threats of harm, injury, humiliation, shaming, and witnessing racial discrimination toward other African American students (Pieterse et al., 2011). As African American students encounter ongoing preexposure to race-based oppression throughout their lifetime, internalization of racism can threaten healthy identity development (Cross & Frost, 2016) and school engagement (Butler-Barnes et al., 2013).

**Category 4: Significance of Social justice Informed Group Intervention**

Participants highlighted that participating in the social justice informed group intervention was crucial to their success in the dual enrollment program. Participants indicated the group as encouraging and supportive. The group allowed participants to destress by talking about personal concerns among people they trusted. Participants noted feeling comfortable talking to me because of our student-counselor relationship over the years. Participants also indicated that the social-emotional lessons delivered were beneficial in supporting them. The participants recalled specific lessons, emphasized how they were delivered, and applied them to their daily lives. The ASCA Student Standards: Mindsets & Behaviors for Student Success describe the knowledge, attitudes, and skills students need to achieve academic success, college and career readiness, and social/emotional development (ASCA, 2021). Though ASCA suggests
the model can be used to help all students, it does not provide intentional instructions on how to support African American students. According to (Holcomb-McCoy, Gonzalez, Harris, & Hines, as cited in Henfield & Washington, 2015), school counselors who formulate interventions that reflect students’ familiar cultural preferences may help participants develop and sustain academic engagement.

**Category 5: Needs for improvement of Social Justice Informed Group Intervention**

None of the participants in the study offered suggestions to improve the Social Justice Informed Group Intervention directly. Although, several of the participants indicated not feeling supported by specific school staff just for being a part of the dual enrollment program. Participants were labeled “the dual enrollment kids” by unsupportive staff members, which carried a negative connotation. Participants noted feeling targeted and ostracized for going against the norm. Participants felt that these same unsupportive staff members wanted them to fail and intentionally removed school staff and programs that directly supported them.

One participant told a story about his Career and Technical Education (CTE) teacher being upset that he decided to quit the CTE program to enroll in the dual enrollment program. The teacher tried to convince the participant that CTE was a better option than dual enrollment. The participant felt that the teacher undermined his intelligence instead of encouraging him to strive for better. African American students are often directed into lower-level courses instead of college preparatory classes (Moore et al., 2010). This is typically due to low teacher expectations or lack of preparation in early grades.

**Category 6: Outcome of Social justice Informed Group Intervention**

This study indicated specific outcomes from participating in the Social Justice Informed Group Intervention. All of the participants in the study indicated that working in cohort toward a
common goal increased group cohesiveness, establishing a sense of social responsibility to ensure everyone was successful. According to Ford (2013), utilizing groups with African American students’ collective identity proves to be more powerful than individual identity as characteristics of the population allows for strong interplay between group goals and group members' responsibility for achieving goals. In addition, participants indicated that working in a group helped lower the anxiety of navigating the college campus alone or interacting in classes with people they do not know. Working as a cohort helped the participants build a bond of accountability, in which the group served as each other’s primary source of support.

Partaking in the Social Justice informed Group Intervention allowed the participant's voices to be heard. As a final assignment for the group intervention, the participants did an advocacy presentation about their experience participating in the dual enrollment program at Westinghouse. The participants did this presentation in front of the Pittsburgh Public Schools administrators and CCAC administrators, and it was also open to the community. The participants indicated taking pride in designing the presentation and demonstrating what they accomplished over the semester, along with having the opportunity to advocate for more resources. Advocating was so important to some participants that they did the presentation despite being nervous and felt they should have more opportunities to do this type of work alongside their academic curriculum.

I recall several of the participants’ wanting to talk about how they would get harassed by White people during their commute to campus. When they told a White school staff member about the incident, they instructed them to leave it out of the presentation. I let the participants decide if they wanted to say it or not, which they were sure to include in the presentation. The participants appreciated being able to say it because it was a real experience, and they felt people
should know about it. This incident highlights how adverse events such as racism can be minimized and silenced because of the negative connotation they carry.

The Emerging Categories and Relationships

The final goal of qualitative research is exploration, and an interview provides much more than the requested information. According to Corbin and Strauss (2008), qualitative inquiry provides thoughtful responses from active participants engaged in "collaborative conversation."

In grounded theory inquiry, active interviews are used to generate concepts and bring out the relationship between these concepts to build theory (Glaser & Strauss, 2012). These active interviews are intended to be a process by which the researcher and the participants collaborate in making meaning. As part of this process, the research analyzes and interprets the concrete data to generate themes, categories, theory, and conceptual framework or model. The inquiry intends to gain an understanding of the participants' perspectives and the relevance of the story shared to discover a theory rather than to verify facts. Corbin and Strauss (2008) argued that the purpose of the interview process is to enliven or activate participants as someone engaged in making meaning by giving respect to the respondents.

Hence, the most understanding for me lay beyond answering research questions. I believe the understanding that allows me as a researcher to discover emerging categories and the emerging relationship among the categories comes from my listening to participants as they pieced together their stories during interviews and from my engagement and collaborative process I had with the participants. The emerged categories emphasized processes over anything else. In my original conception of dual enrolment, I had thought of a set of actions—what the dual enrollment program does and does not—as the definition of dual enrollment. And I envisioned these actions constituting a state of being that participants tapped into. The emphasis on the
process, however, reveals the theme that dual enrollment is a relationship-based program- that it requires not only the actions of the program providers (e.g., instructors, facilitators) but the consideration of the context and situations of the students. The emphasis on process also reveals another theme regarding the dynamic of the dual enrollment: it is not only between the dual enrollment program and the students enrolled in the program; it also involves the community to the students who belong racially and geographically. What may suffice as an effective dual enrollment program for some students may not be enough for students with different contextual needs. Regardless, identifying the students’ need and a clear understanding of the students’ culture and their contextual needs as part of defining and designing a dual enrollment program.

The categories that emerged are phases of a more extensive process of conditions, interactions, and consequences. The category of reconceptualizing and defining dual enrollment and the remaining five categories (risk and protective factors, significances, limitation, and outcome of social justice informed group intervention program) are linked closely to each other.

During the early coding stages, I noticed several themes that arose that I was unsure where I would categorize due to how interrelated they were. For example, protective factors seemed to correlate with the risk factors closely. Participants indicated that having the class during the school day was a protective factor. However, it was a protective factor because of the multiple responsibilities they had after school, which was a risk factor. One participant, Becky, said, “We had jobs, we had to support ourselves, we would not have time to do this after school.” This indicated that specific priorities, such as being able to support yourself in the present financially, may take precedence over a dual enrollment opportunity that can help prepare you for the future. Therefore, the dual enrollment schedule served as a protective factor because it allowed students to participate even with their multiple responsibilities, which were risk factors.
Intentionally putting interventions in place for participants is crucial for success and participation.

Also, an overarching theme that seemed to interrelate the categories was the systematic racial oppression in the school setting. Although schools are often viewed as institutions that support the growth and development of all students, Allen et al. (2013) maintained that schools are a microcosm of the larger society. The contextual definition of dual enrollment participants developed included racial justice. Participants were not typically allowed to participate in dual enrollment. Schools in low-income areas like Westinghouse have fewer resources and opportunities due to racial oppression. Participants indicated microaggressions during their commute and a lack of self-efficacy for vigorous coursework. The microaggressions they experienced during the commute displayed a more overt form of racism. The lack of self-efficacy for vigorous coursework may be attributed to low teacher expectations and minimal advanced course offerings at Westinghouse, and covert racism. Due to oppressive zoning practices, students from the already underserved Homewood must attend Westinghouse. During the participant's final presentation, participants felt empowered to advocate at the end of the semester to continue having these opportunities and destigmatize the school's negative reputation. This reputation comes from the racial bias and stereotypes associated with going to school at Westinghouse.

Framework for Sustaining Equity and Academic Success for Dual Enrollment African American Students

Identify the Need

While working as a school counselor at Pittsburgh Westinghouse, I discovered that the Pittsburgh Public School district had a partnership with the Community College of Allegheny
County, which allowed students to participate in dual enrollment. However, I noticed that none of our students were involved in the program. When I inquired to teachers and staff why we did not offer dual enrollment courses, I was told that “Dual enrollment just isn’t for our kids,” “We tried it years ago, and they all failed,” and “Well, this is Westinghouse” as if academic success was so out of reach for our students because of the neighborhood they lived in. The deficit ideologies and low expectations from the very educators responsible for teaching our students.

**Collaborative work with students to understand barriers**

During the spring of 2018, I met with the entire 11th-grade class about the opportunity to participate in dual enrollment. The interested students met with me the next day to discuss it more in detail. Instead of going straight into a conversation about dual enrollment, we had a reflective conversation on their definition of success. Next, I asked the group to list on the board barriers they felt would interfere with their ability to be successful in taking a college course in high school. Along with barriers that stemmed from the lack of resources, I noticed that most of the listed barriers were from racial oppression. The response that resonated most with me was, “What if we don’t know what we need? How would we know what to ask? As I documented the notes, it opened my eyes to the reality that first-generation students have high expectations of attending college. However, many of them lack the knowledge necessary to navigate the college application process, let alone the knowledge of how to be successful in college. Figure 1 provides an example of a group activity I did with the students to identify barriers to success.
I met with another school counselor and principal of Westinghouse, along with the Dean of CCAC, to present the data that I received from the students about their perceived barriers toward dual enrollment. We worked together to put interventions in place for the students to succeed in the program. Several of the students indicated not being able to participate because they had multiple responsibilities after school. The principal allowed us as school counselors to align the master schedule up so that the students could take the classes during the school day. The Dean of CCAC agreed to be flexible and offer the courses during the time. We continued to go through all the barriers and put as many interventions in place as possible to support the students. Figure 2 provides an example of the process used to create interventions for barriers that were presented by the students.
Creating Social Justice Informed-School Group Intervention

To provide students with additional support throughout the process, I decided to do a weekly social justice-informed group intervention. The Dean of CCAC suggested we enroll the students in the college's Academic and Professional Development course to ensure the students would get the weekly intervention and assigned me as the instructor since I already had a good
rapport with the students. The purpose of the course was to teach students how to be successful in college while providing support through culturally relevant psychoeducational and social-emotional lessons. As an instructor, I wanted the class to be reflective and interactive. The classroom was arranged in a “U” shape to encourage attentiveness and engagement. Social-emotional learning lessons were created based on students' perceived barriers to dual enrollment.

**Managing the Social Justice School Counseling Program**

The program started during the fall of the 2019 school year. I met with the students and the Dean of CCAC at the Westinghouse. The program took place from September 2019 to December 2019, over 15 weeks. I used what the students perceived as barriers to make and administer a pre/post survey following the guidelines of a SMART Goal from the ASCA model (ASCA, 2012). The acronym SMART stands for specific, measurable, achievable, results-focused, and time-bound. SMART goals allow school counselors to design comprehensive school counseling programs derived from student behavior, attendance, and academic outcomes data. I came up with:

1. Believe I can successfully pass a college class in high school
2. I believe college is affordable
3. I feel comfortable taking college classes with people I know
4. I know what career I want to pursue when I graduate high school
5. I will be able to manage my high school work along with my other responsibilities

Together, the Dean and I shared the dual enrollment schedule and supports we put in place to help ensure their success. The Dean let the students know he would serve as a point of contact when the students were on campus. I wanted the students to get the full college experience. Therefore, instead of having our teachers instruct the classes at the building, I had
the students walk to the local Community College of Allegheny County branch Monday through Thursday. On Fridays, the students stayed in the building where I taught their class in our college prep room.

**Social Justice Informed School Counseling Program Outcome**

17 of the 20 students finished the dual enrollment program. The three students who had to withdraw moved out of the school district. The students took Introduction to Sociology for three credits, Intro to Computer Information and Technology for three credits, and Academic and Professional Development with me for one credit. The students earned a cumulative 2.9 GPA in Introduction to Sociology, 3.0 GPA in Introduction to Sociology, and 3.9 GPA in the Academic and Professional Development course. Collectively, they earned a 3.2 GPA. Without the Academic and Professional Development course, they made a 2.9 GPA higher than the 2.6 GPA achieved by the general admitted first-year students at CCAC. We achieved academic success, but Pittsburgh Westinghouse had the most students dual enrolled in the entire School District.

The cohort of students continued to take college classes in high school while participating in school counseling intervention groups. We were able to grow the program by offering students the opportunity to gain college credits through Advanced Placement programs and a College in High School program through a collaboration with the University of Pittsburgh. Not only did the entire cohort of students graduate on time, but some also obtained over 20 college credits they were able to transfer to a post-secondary institution. Potential participants from the program's cohort were juniors in high school at the intervention time. This cohort of students graduated from high school in the summer of 2021, enrolled in college, or entered the workforce.
Suggestions for Future Research

One of the benefits of this research project was that it met the goal of finding participants who held expertise as dually enrolled African American students and social justice informed group participants. That expertise also presents a problem in that none of the students shows evidence of having dropped out of classes or having been unsuccessful in their enrollment. Thus, it might be helpful for someone to identify African American students in the dual enrollment program who have withdrawn from or failed the dual enrollment classes to research their perceptions of what led them to be unsuccessful in the dual enrollment program. Since this study takes place in a single community in Pittsburgh, similar studies at other low-income school districts in and outside Pittsburgh could help educators generalize beyond this single group. Additionally, as presented in Chapter 4, the researcher entered into this research project with his own biased as an African American graduate student and a former school counselor of the research participants with the established working relationship, similar studies by other researchers without this bias could help educators to examine the experiences of students' perception from a different viewpoint.

Furthermore, research into the school counselors' and teachers' perceptions of dual enrollment, the achievement gap, and African American students' learning engagement might compare African American Students' perception of dual enrollment and social justice-informed group intervention.

Suggestions for Practice and School Counselors

The findings in this study provide several indications that could provide direction to school counselors, school districts, and counselor education programs. First, as it relates to academic success and equity, the narratives shared by the participants in this study shed light on
how African American students understand dual enrollment and experience the social justice-informed school counseling intervention. Educators need to be aware of how racial oppression and other covert systems of racism can cause inequities in African American students' college and career readiness. Finally, educators must intentionally create interventions and policies specifically for African American students to successfully promote systematic change. In this section, the researcher reflects on the implications for the following: school counselors, school districts, and school counseling education programs. Drawing on the themes produced in the study, each importance will be discussed in detail.

School counselors play a critical role in African American students' college and career readiness. By utilizing a social justice approach to comprehensive school counseling programs, school counselors can increase the participation and academic success of dually enrolled African American students. School counselors must be intentional about identifying barriers to dual enrollment for African American students. This can be done by collecting data both outcome and perception from school staff and the students. According to the study, school personnel may have subjective understandings of African American students’ college readiness. Therefore, it is essential to get feedback from the students as well. School counselors should collaborate with other school staff and community members to collectively create interventions and support systems to help students achieve academic success. According to the study, support is not always identified as academic. Participants identified that having genuine relationships with adults, staying motivated, and having adults who care can serve as protective factors for dual enrollment. Also, school counselors can utilize culturally relevant groups and guidance lessons to increase the college knowledge and self-efficacy of African American students. Finally, school counselors can create a culture of student agency by providing students with meaningful and
relevant activities and lessons driven by their interests. This can give students a voice and empower them to take an interest in their education, thereby increasing their academic success.

**Implications for School Districts**

School districts need to be mindful of oppressive practices that may be harmful to African American students' college and career readiness. School districts must be intentional to equitable opportunities for all students to participate in college readiness programs. One way this can be achieved is by collaborating with local colleges in the community to build dual enrollment partnerships. Also, school districts need to be intentional about hiring school staff who have high expectations for African American student learning. In addition, school districts should be intentional about hiring African American staff as they can also serve as role-models for students in urban schools, increasing students’ college readiness through vicarious self-efficacy. Finally, to ensure school counselors can create and implement social justice informed school counseling programs, school districts must be intentional about providing school counselors with ongoing culturally relevant professional development.

**Implications for Counselor Education Programs**

To ensure school counselors are prepared to work with African American students on college readiness, counselor education programs need to be more intentional about providing counselors in training culturally relevant courses and internship opportunities in urban schools. Many school counselors believe that their graduate training did not fully prepare them for working with minority and low-income students in urban settings. Counselors point to a lack of opportunity to explore the urban education setting and no curriculum on college preparedness counseling (Savitz-Romer, 2011). Although the Council for the Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs (CACREP, 2009) requires that programs seeking accreditation
include a component that addresses multiculturalism, it may not guarantee curriculum that can help counselors in training identify obstacles African American students face that are caused by racial discrimination, limiting their college readiness. Counselor education programs should consider requiring counselors in training to complete a portion of their internship hours in an urban school setting. During that time, counselors in training should be required to complete a data-driven social justice informed project to fulfill their graduation requirements. In addition, counselor education programs should require counselors in training to take additional courses in critical ideology or social justice.

**Contribution to the Professional Literature**

The issues of equity and achievement for dual enrollment for African American students have primarily been viewed from a deficit perspective, focusing on the lack of resources, low socioeconomic status, poverty, and other inequities. However, research literature that addresses critical issues in the daily lives of ethnic minority students ignores the voices of these students (Fernandez, 2002). Thus, there has not been much research that explicitly allows African American students to voice their attitudes or perceptions on dual enrollment programs. This investigation provides African American students who participated in the social justice-informed school counseling group intervention while dual-enrolled an opportunity to express their education experience in their own words, countering the deficit ideology.

This study explored the perceived experience of dually enrolled African American Students who participated in the social-justice informed school counseling group intervention at Pittsburgh Westinghouse to generate a substantive theory of social-justice informed school counseling program that promotes African American student's success in dual enrollment
programs and to provide educators valuable insight they can use to promote the equity and academic achievement of dual-enrolled African American students.

This study contributes to closing the college readiness and achievement gaps between Black and White students regarding dual enrollment. Over the years, there has been extensive research about how the achievement gap affects poor students of color, yet we rarely provide strategies or interventions to solve the problem. This study provides professionals with analysis that captures how African American students understand dual enrollment, what they view as protective and risk factors to dual enrollment, the significance of participating in a social justice informed group intervention while dual-enrolled, the need for improvement of social justice informed programs, and outcomes of participating social justice informed group intervention while dual enrolled. Additionally, this study provides a culturally responsive theoretical framework approach to support the college readiness of African American and low-income students.

**Chapter Summary**

Chapter five discussed the six categories which emerged from the data analysis process that provided insights into how these African American students perceived and experienced the social-justice informed comprehensive school counseling program at Pittsburgh Westinghouse while dual-enrolled at CCAC. Significant contributions included: the development of a contextual definition of dual enrollment as understood by African American students in this study, Factors Supporting Dual Enrollment, Risk Undermining Dual Enrollment, Significance of Social Justice Informed Group Intervention, Needs for Improvement of Social Justice Informed Group Intervention, and the Outcome of the Social Justice Informed Group Intervention. In addition, this chapter highlighted a conceptual framework for Sustaining Equity and Academic
Success for Dual-Enrolled African American Students. Also, this chapter offers suggestions for future research and implications for educational professionals. Finally, this chapter highlighted the study’s contribution to professional literature.
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126


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APPENDIX A

RECRUITMENT MATERIAL

Call for Research Participants

Social Justice School Counseling: Promoting Academic Achievement and Equity Among Dual-Enrolled African American Students

African American students’ voices are needed for this study. Far too often, research literature that addresses critical issues in the daily lives of African American students ignores their voice. Therefore, there has not been much research that explicitly allows African American students to voice their attitudes or perceptions on dual enrollment. There has been extensive research about how the achievement gap affects students of color, yet we rarely provide strategies or interventions to solve the problem. This study aims to explore the perceived experience of African American students who participated in the social-justice informed school counseling group intervention while dual-enrolled at Pittsburgh Westinghouse to generate strategies educators can use to promote academic success and equity.

This is a qualitative study in which participants will be interviewed individually. The interview will take place online over Zoom and last approximately 1 hours. There will be no compensation for participating in this study.

Criteria for participation in the study:

- You identify as Black or African American
- You are age 18 or older
- You must have participated in the social justice-informed school counseling program at Pittsburgh Westinghouse while dually enrolled in the fall of 2019.
- Willing to participate in a semi-structured interview.
- Willing to share perceptions and experiences of being dual enrolled a Pittsburgh Westinghouse
- You have access and ability to use email and secure video conferencing platforms provided by the researcher
- You are willing to consent to audio recording of interview

If you would like to participate in the study or have questions about it, please respond to me, Sylvester C. Hanner M.S. Ed., NCC, at sylhanner@gmail.com. Consent for participation has been attached for your review. I am a doctoral candidate at Duquesne University, conducting this study under the supervision of Dr. Waganesh A. Zeleke, Ed. D, LCPC, NCC (zelekew@duq.edu). The IRB has approved this study at Duquesne University (#2022/03/1).

Best,

Sylvester C. Hanner M.S. Ed., NCC
Doctoral Candidate
Duquesne University
412-812-6279
APPENDIX B

INFORMED CONSENT

DUQUESNE UNIVERSITY
PITTSBURGH, PENNSYLVANIA

CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN A RESEARCH STUDY

TITLE:
Social Justice School Counseling: Promoting Academic Achievement and Equity Among Dual-Enrolled African American Students

INVESTIGATOR:
Mr. Sylvester C. Hanner, M.S.Ed., NCC
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ADVISOR:
Dr. Waganesh A. Zeleke, Ed. D, LCPC, NCC
Duquesne University
412-396-2465, zelekew@duq.edu

SOURCE OF SUPPORT:
This study is being performed as partial fulfillment of the requirements for the doctoral degree in Counselor Education and Supervision at Duquesne University.

STUDY OVERVIEW:
You are invited to participate in a study that seeks to understand African American students' experience in a social justice school counseling program while dual-enrolled at Pittsburgh Westinghouse. Topics addressed in the research include college readiness, barriers to dual enrollment, and support needed to achieve academic success. In addition, volunteers for this research will participate in a semi-structured interview on Zoom. These interviews are expected to take approximately 1.5 hours to complete. Participation in this study would require some comfort talking about your personal experiences as an African American student taking classes for college credit in high school. However, risks associated with participation are minimal and no greater than would be encountered in day-to-day conversations.
PURPOSE:

The purpose of this study is to investigate the experiences of dual-enrolled African American Students who participated in the school counseling intervention program at Pittsburgh Westinghouse. Far too often, research literature that addresses critical issues in the daily lives of African American students ignores their voice. Thus, there has not been much research that explicitly allows African American students to voice their attitudes or perceptions on dual enrollment programs. This research looks to provide a more detailed picture of what African American students face regarding equity and academic achievement in dual enrollment and situating any interventions or strategies school counselors may implement to support students’ success.

In order to qualify for participation, you must:

- be an African American adult (age 18+)
- have participated in the school counseling program intervention while dual-enrolled at Pittsburgh Westinghouse in the fall of 2019
- be willing to participate in the study

PARTICIPANT PROCEDURES:

If you consent to participate, you will be asked to participate in a semi-structured interview via Zoom.

- The investigator will be looking to interview African American students who participated in the social justice-informed counseling program while dual enrolled at Pittsburgh Westinghouse.
- Interviews will take place until the data meets saturation.
- Potential volunteers can confirm participation by calling the investigator by phone or responding to the outreach email.
- Once the volunteer confirms participation in the study, the investigator will contact the participant within 48 hours to schedule an interview time.
- After scheduling an interview, the participant will be given a Zoom link for participation at the agreed-upon date and time.
- Participants can return the consent form via email or complete it before starting the scheduled interview.
- The investigator will review the consent form with the participant before starting the interview.
- The interview will consist of questions about your experiences in the comprehensive school counseling program while dual-enrolled at Pittsburgh Westinghouse, such as: what dual enrollment means to you, challenges, and barriers to taking college courses in high school, the school counseling program you participate in, and what helped you be successful while dual enrolled.
- The interviews will record both video and audio, then be transcribed.
- Participants are asked to interview in a quiet, secure location free of noise and disruption.
• Participants are asked to complete the interviews on a laptop, desktop, or tablet rather than a phone.
• Please allow up to 1.5 hours to complete the interview.

RISKS AND BENEFITS:

This project is not expected to involve any risks of harm any greater than those ordinarily encountered in daily life. There are no direct benefits of participating in this study; however, you may experience positive psychological effects from having your experience validated by others and knowing that you assisted in the research. You may also develop personal insight into your own experiences that may impact your academic success in positive ways.

COMPENSATION:

There will be no compensation for participating in this study. Likewise, participation in the project will require no monetary cost to you.

CONFIDENTIALITY:

Your participation in this study, and any identifiable personal information you provide, will be kept confidential to every extent possible and will be destroyed five years after the data collection is completed. Your name will never appear on any survey or research instruments, as all participants will be able to select a pseudonym name used for the study. All written and electronic forms of data and study materials will be kept secure. Electronic data (electronic transcriptions, researcher journals) will be stored in a password-protected folder on my personal password-protected computer. Video/audio recordings will be stored in a password-protected folder on a password-protected computer and will be destroyed within five years of completing the study. Transcriptions will be deidentified using pseudonyms which participants will choose before starting the interview. Paper records (field notes, printed documents, consent forms, other study materials) will be stored in a locked filing cabinet only accessible to the investigator. All results will be reported in aggregate. All direct quotes from participants will be presented using pseudonyms. All written and electronic documentation will be destroyed within five years of completing the study. Additionally, any publications or presentations concerning this research will only use data combined with all subjects; therefore, no one will be able to determine how you responded. All direct quotes from participants will be presented using pseudonyms.

The Zoom platform is HIPAA compliant for covered entities (Zoom, 2020). In the use of Zoom, privacy features remain in the control of the meeting host and approved participants at the host's discretion. These features include entrance to the meeting, screen sharing, and recording abilities. Each meeting link is generated only for each specific interview, and the waiting room is enabled to allow the meeting host to verify participants prior to entry. Following participant entrance to the meeting, the host can lock the room to prevent further entry. In addition, zoom protects data at the application level using an advanced encryption system (Zoom, 2020). For more information, visit https://zoom.us/docs/doc/Zoom-hipaa.pdf.
RIGHT TO WITHDRAW:

You are under no obligation to participate in this study. You are free to withdraw your consent to participate at any time without being penalized by the researchers or Duquesne University. In addition, your participation in the study may be terminated without your consent if the investigators determine it is unsafe for you to continue.

SUMMARY OF RESULTS:

A summary of the results of this study will be provided to you at no cost upon your request. You may request this summary by contacting the researchers and requesting it. The information provided to you will not be your responses but rather a summary of what was discovered during the research project.

FUTURE USE OF DATA:

Any information collected that can identify you will not be used for future research studies or provided to other researchers.

COVID-19 CONSIDERATIONS:

I understand that the researcher(s) running this study have put in place the following guidelines to address concerns related to COVID-19:

- Participant interviews are all being conducted virtually via zoom.
VOLUNTARY CONSENT:

I have read this informed consent form and understand what is being requested of me. I also understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time, for any reason, without any consequences. Based on this, I certify I am willing to participate in this research project.

I understand that if I have any questions about my participation in this study, I may contact the Primary Investigator, Mr. Sylvester C. Hanner, at 412-812-6279, sylhanner@gmail.com, or Advisor Dr. Waganesh A. Zeleke at 412-396-2465, zelekew@duq.edu. In addition, if I have any questions regarding my rights and protections as a subject in this study, I can contact Dr. David Delmonico, Chair of the Duquesne University Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects, at 412.396.1886 or irb@duq.edu.

This project has been approved/verified by Duquesne University’s Institutional Review Board.

Signing below indicates your voluntary consent to participate in this project.

________________________________________________________________________
Participant’s NameDate

________________________________________________________________________
Researcher’s NameDate
APPENDIX C

INSTRUMENTS

Semi-structured interview protocol for Dual Enrolled of African American Students

Study

Name:

Pseudonym:

Gender:

Class:

Interview Protocol

1. As an African American student, what does dual enrollment mean to you?
   a) What did it mean to you to have the opportunity to be dual enrolled at Westinghouse?
   b) What do you believe are the benefits of dual enrollment?

2. Before deciding to participate, what kinds of support did you believe you needed to be successful to pass a college class while in high school?
   a) What hesitations or barriers did you believe may prevent you from successfully taking a college class while in high school?

3. What do you believe helped you be successful while dual-enrolled?
   a) Tell me about your thoughts and experience on the weekly group you participated in on Friday while dual-enrolled.
   b) What topics or lessons stood out to you? If none, what would you have liked to learn?
   c) Tell me about your thoughts and experience about doing classes in a cohort?
   d) Tell me about your thoughts and experience on having classes during the school day.
e) Tell me about your thoughts and experience on taking the classes at CCAC versus at Westinghouse.

f) What are your thoughts about the Dean of Education coming to Westinghouse to speak with you about taking classes and taking you on a college tour before you started?

g) Tell me your thoughts on your final presentation at CCAC.

4. What suggestions or feedback do you have on how the program could have been better?