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A Study of the San Antonio Education Partnership (SAEP):

Family, School, and Community

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A Study of the San Antonio Education Partnership (SAEP): Family, School, and Community

by

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DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to my father, Slater Hunter King,
who inspired me to work for the educational betterment of all children.

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A Study of the San Antonio Education Partnership (SAEP):

Family, School, and Community

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This study explores how the San Antonio Education Partnership (SAEP) as a collaborative partnership operates, and ascertains what are main ingredients of its success. The success of this partnership lends itself to multi-layered support given by its various components to the student which include (1) The student's family (2) The participating educational institutions and foundations (3) The resources provided by the government and business community.

The research attempts to uncover whether the success of Hispanic and African-American students who are currently enrolled in San Antonio Education Program, was based primarily on external factors, internal factors, or both. It will also attempt to determine the primary reasons why these students enrolled into the SAEP program, and to what extent their participation in the program impacted their decision to attend college. The research for this study was conducted during

the month of July, 2006. Of the forty-two students who participated in this research project, thirty were Hispanic and the other twelve students were of African-American descent.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

A new kind of road is being built. This road should not be thought of as connecting two points because it will connect all points. It will not go from "here to there" because there will be no more "there." We will all be "here," on a road where the speed limit is the speed of light (Graziadei, 1995)

Context of the Problem

As public high school graduation rates continue to decline in the United States, a growing number of community activists, political leaders, and educational visionaries are advocating that universities, as well as community colleges, take a more active lead in developing functional partnerships with local public schools in order to increase graduation rates and prevent high levels of remediation on college campuses across America. While state and federal agencies use different methods to determine high school graduation and dropout rates, the Manhattan Institute, which uses a method favored by many education policy groups, determined in 2001 that the U.S. graduation rate was 70 percent. According to their data, seven out of ten ninth graders graduated in four years with a high school diploma. They also determined that the U.S. graduation rate for African American and Hispanic students was at 50%, and that only five out of ten ninth graders graduated four years later with a high school diploma (Green and Foster, 2003).

An even bigger concern is at-risk students who have no support from their families or from the institutions they attend. Nonetheless, researchers have been trying to

ascertain are some of the key factors that contribute to a student's ability to persist to graduation, and ultimately enroll in college. Pascarella and Terenzini (1980) discuss some of these issues in their research when describing the persistence model. They characterize this kind of student as (1) lacking money, (2) coming from a family that have never been to college, and (3) coming from communities that have not supported their children in pursuing post-secondary educational opportunities.

Typically, students from this group have an inordinately high dropout rate and rarely graduate from high school, let alone attempt to enter college. However, studies have shown that when these types of students—those susceptible to dropping out at a young age—have parental support, institutional support, and resource support, they are twice as likely to persist toward completing high school and pursuing a college than those who do not receive this same type of support.

The Emergence of the Collaborative Educational Movement

As result of the rise in dropout rates and the lack of student engagement in high schools across the United States, collaborative partnerships began slowly to germinate in the 1970s. One of the first institutions of higher education that became nationally recognized for its collaborative work with urban high schools was LaGuardia Community College. In an attempt to assist at-risk students in graduating from high school and make a smooth transition into college, LaGuardia Community College established one of the first "early college high schools" in the country.

This early educational model provided first-generation and low-income students with viable options to do college-level work while in high school, as well as offering

them the necessary guidance and resources to become proficient in key areas such as English and math. The three strategic aims of the early college high school model was to (1) make students more aware of their options to attend college, (2) to set higher standards for high school graduation, and (3) to ensure that each student had an adult to provide advice and guidance. By consolidating these aims into a workable framework, the success of LaGuardia's program gained national recognition and became a sustainable resource for enabling potential dropouts to enter college and succeed.

What further fueled the growth and demand for educational partnerships like the early college high school concept in the 1980s was the groundbreaking report *A Nation as Risk*, which was released by the National Commission on Excellence in Education in 1983. Up until that time, federal reform and dollars targeted early years of schooling. As empirical studies began to reveal that gains in grades K-4 diminished as students moved into the latter stages of their school years, and that a larger percentage of low-income students did not graduate after their ninth grade year, educators from around the nation began to contemplate how they could circumvent the problem. In 1988, Congress enacted the Educational Partnership Act for the purpose of encouraging the creation of educational partnerships to demonstrate their contribution to educational reform.

Benefits of Educational Partnerships

Although Congress later cut funding for the Educational Partnerships Program (EPP), there were several inherent and financial benefits that became apparent even without the funding. Some of the most evident benefits included:

(1) Tax credits that reduce the liability of companies making donations to non-profit organizations,

(2) Helping the education community to prepare better-trained workers,

(3) The ability to share talents and expenditures.

Ultimately, the Educational Partnership Act became a stimulus to bring about reform and galvanize business and educational communities into action. Some examples of these partnerships include:

- The Baltimore Public School System has received over $20 million from national and local foundations to build innovative schools.
- The Exxon-Mobile Foundation awarded $2 million in grants to more than 3,700 schools nationwide. Most of the grant money was used by local school officials to purchase computer hardware and software products.
- The Oracle Foundation entered into a partnership with the New Orleans School District and donated 1,000 computers and 200 laser printers.
- The Toyota Tapestry program, which is administered by the National Science Teachers Association, distributes 50 grants of up to $10,000 each, and a minimum of 20 mini-grants of $ 2,500 each to K-12 science teachers.

Replication of the Early College Model

While the recent development of educational partnerships have led to the improvement of better urban school environments, LaGuardia Community College's educational partnership is unique in that it specifically focuses on mentoring and assisting low-income students to graduate successfully from high school and attend college.

Furthermore, many private foundations have provided seed money for its replication on other college campuses. The Ford Foundation helped support the early college model by allocating funds to start six schools, and by the early 1990s there were over 20 early college schools throughout the country.

In 1993, with financial support from the Pew Charitable Trust and the DeWitt Wallace Readers Digest Fund, a loose network of middle colleges coalesced and became a consortium known as the Middle College National Consortium (MCNC). And most recently, the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation has provided money for its programming, as well as seed money that can be used to start new MCNC partnerships on other college campuses around the country. In comparison with other programs with the same aims and objectives, MCNC's graduation rates have exceeded 80% and their college-going rates are more than 85%.

The SAEP Study

The purpose of this study was to examine the elements of an educational partnership located in San Antonio, Texas called the San Antonio Education Partnership (SAEP). Originally founded in 1988, the San Antonio Education Partnership was an idea brought to the attention of Mayor Henry Cisneros by Communities Organized for Public Services (COPS) and Metro Alliance. Mayor Cisneros, with the help of these two organizations, launched a series of meetings with public school superintendents, local community colleges, university presidents, and the business community.

After deliberating over the problems facing the city, the mission statement that emerged from this new partnership was "to develop a model for involvement of the

broader segments of society." In essence, the overarching objective of San Antonio Education Partnership was to invest in the educational future of students from low-income and at-risk backgrounds with the intent to increase their entry into college. Along those same lines, the three specific goals of the SAEP were to (1) improve academic performance in high school, (2) boost high school completion rates, and (3) significantly increase entry into and graduation from college. The major players that comprise the SAEP are the COPS/Metro alliance, the corporate sector, seven school districts, four local colleges within the Alamo Community College District, and the City of San Antonio.

Before the inception of SAEP, the San Antonio School District was experiencing a high level of inadequate school completion and performance rates by students from the lower socioeconomic and predominantly minority areas of the city. Another major concern had to do with the future local workforce. As a city with approximately a 60% minority population, the business and community leaders realized that a poorly educated workforce would severely limit the city's future economic prospects.

Funding

Since its inception, the program has awarded millions of dollars in scholarships to nearly 6,800 students. Most of this funding has been received from San Antonio's business community, and more recently the City of San Antonio has committed to awarding over $ 1.3 million in scholarships for five new high schools on an annual basis. Another program launched in 1993 that has secured millions of dollars for SAEP is the

Adopt-A-School Program. Since its inception, total donations have exceeded $3 million for scholarships. Total donations awarded overall from fall 1989 to spring 2005 have been $8,680,275.

Over the years, some of the major donors to the San Antonio Education Partnership have included H-E-B, Toyota, Bank of America, SBC Communications, USAA Federal Savings Bank, HUMANA, The Gambrinus Company, Frost Bank, Time Warner Cable, Broadway National Bank, Martha-Ellen Tye Foundation, J.P. Morgan, Bexar County Commissioners, McDermott Fund, Rio San Antonio Cruises, and many more.

Selection Criteria For College Success

The main purpose of the SAEP is to provide financial incentives in the form of future scholarships for students trying to enter college. In order to enroll in the SAEP program, students at the ninth-grade level must first sign a commitment letter with their parents agreeing to earn an 80% academic average and a 95% attendance rate. Students meeting these criteria by the time they graduate will then qualify for a scholarship to attend any college or university in the city of San Antonio. However, graduates who decide to attend colleges or universities outside of San Antonio are not eligible for the scholarship.

In order to ensure that students are given adequate guidance and support to attain the academic and attendance goals in the program, the SAEP has counselors assigned to 18 high schools in eight school districts throughout the city of San Antonio. There are

also two full-time counselors who assist SAEP students who attend St. Philip's College and San Antonio College. These counselors' help students get registered and handle all of their academic and counseling needs during their first year in college. Currently, there is no academic support for SAEP students after their freshman year in college; however, some still visit the SAEP advisors for academic guidance and other counseling matters.

While most of the students who take advantage of the SAEP program are from low-income families, anyone, regardless of income, ethnicity, or nationality, is eligible to enroll in the program.

Increasing College Success

In an attempt to boost graduation rates of SAEP students at the college level, the San Antonio Education Partnership has added a new program aimed at increasing retention and graduation rates at two- and four-year college institutions. Under an initiative called Partnerships for College Assess and Success (PCAS), the Academy for Educational Development (AED) recently awarded the San Antonio Education Partnership a grant from the Lumina Foundation. As one of eight selected partnerships in the nation, SAEP students will receive extra support services aimed at strengthening school-college linkages, broadening student support systems, and establishing efficient tracking systems of its students across the grade 9-16 educational pipeline. Most of these activities will initially focus on students attending two-year colleges, since 70% of the graduates matriculate to two- year institutions in the San Antonio area.

In addition to having sponsorship from the Academy of Educational Development, SAEP is aligning itself with other Lumina-funded projects such as

Achieving the Dream at the Alamo Community College District (ACCD) campuses and participating in the Alamo Area Articulation Transfer Council, which seeks to improve transfer policies and services for students.

The most recent initiative that has been launched is the Incentive Scholarship Program. The program is designed to motivate students to choose a declared major and establish educational goals in their first year of college. By choosing a major and having their educational plans certified by a college advisor, students are then eligible to double their scholarship amount from $350.00 to $700.00.

Demographics of Students Served

Based on some of the published data about students enrolled in the SAEP program, demographic information reveals that since the inception of the program, 93.4% of the students have been minority, and of that, 86.1% have been Hispanic. In regard to economic background, in the year 2002, it was estimated that 83.8% of its students were considered economically disadvantaged, up from 79% the previous year.

Because this study will focus on researching how well the SAEP program has served both Hispanic and African-American students, a complete demographic assessment will be done to determine what percentage of African-Americans make up the 13.9% of non-Hispanic students served by the program from 2001 to 2006.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to determine how the San Antonio Education Partnership (SAEP) as a collaborative partnership operates as well as ascertain the main ingredients for its success. Does the success of this partnership lend itself to multi-layered

support passed from its various components to the student, including: (1) the student's family, (2) the participating educational institutions and foundations, and (3) The resources provided by the government and business community.

The research attempts to uncover whether the success of Hispanic and African-American students who are currently enrolled in SAEP was based primarily on external factors, internal factors, or both. It will also attempt to determine the primary reasons why these students enrolled into the SAEP program.

Research Questions

The dissertation was guided by research questions determined by the researcher to be significant to the stated purpose of the study. The following research questions were addressed by the study:

1.) What specific external factors do Hispanic and African American students enrolled in the SAEP program identify as contributing to their success in graduating from the program (i.e., family support, role model, mentor, friends)?

2.) What are the specific reasons that Hispanic and African American students choose to enroll in the SAEP program (i.e., promise of financial support through scholarships, counseling and program support, exposure through activities outside of high school)?

3.) What specific institutional/internal factors do Hispanic and African American students enrolled in the SAEP program identify as contributing to student success (i.e., advisors on campus, scholarship incentives, campus tours,

summer remediation program)?

4.) How do Hispanic and African American students compare in respect to:

   a. External factors (family support, role models, mentors)?

   b. The specific reasons they joined the program (i.e. programs, counseling)?

   c. Institutional/Internal factors (i.e., advisors on campus, scholarship incentives, campus tours, summer remediation program)?

Definition of Terms

For the purpose of this study, the following definitions are offered:

SAEP - San Antonio Education Partnership

ACCD - Alamo Community College District

COPS - Communities Organized for Public Service

Metro Alliance - Local network of social agencies in the San Antonio metropolitan area

AED - Academy of Educational Development

PCAS - Partnerships for College Access and Success

MCNC - Middle College National Consortium

Early College High School - Associated with the Middle College National Consortium

Progressive Partnership - A University-School Partnership that has an open-ended relationship with the community

Traditional Partnership - A closed model involving two institutions – University/ School

Significance of the Study

As more universities and colleges reach out to develop partnerships with local and state schools boards, businesses, and industry, the success of educational partnerships will be contingent on how well they are able to forge relationships internally among their own faculty, staff, and administrators, as well as externally with K-12 schools, student clientele, business and industry, and community-based organizations (Rendon, 2000). If, for example, this type of partnership fails to address and cater to the specific needs of each of the partners involved, ultimately, it will not succeed in significantly boosting the number of at-risk students graduating from high school and entering college.

Some of the questions the researcher intends to uncover are:

1. What are the potential barriers that prevent future collaborative relationships between community colleges and local public schools from being successful?
2. Can the San Antonio College District model be replicated in other parts of Texas and the country, and thereby have a greater impact on raising high school graduation and college enrollment rates, especially in a way that will significantly increase the graduation rates of African-American students?

Limitations of the Study

This study assesses the impact of an educational partnership program that is linked to eight San Antonio school districts, and interfaces with 18 high schools throughout the city. This is an ex post facto study and did not test hypotheses. Rather, it attempted to produce propositions and hypotheses from an analysis of data.

The specific focus of the study was on African-American students who were enrolled in the SAEP program; therefore, the results should not be generalized to other demographic groups that participate in the program, nor should the results be generalized to other educational partnership alliances that bear any resemblance to the goals and objectives of the San Antonio Education Partnership.

The responses by the participants and their demonstrated academic success may have been affected by external factors and variables not included in the study. However, based on the results of the findings, this study could be replicated by other educational partnerships involving high schools and colleges in an attempt to either launch a new program with similar objectives or enhance a program's effectiveness.

Summary

As more cities and states endeavor to become competitive in their bids to draw industry and commerce to their regions, they are becoming painfully aware that having a skilled workforce is integrally connected with how effective local high schools are in preparing their students for college and beyond. Unfortunately, many studies are showing that there is not a seamless transition in our K-16 educational system, and that students are falling through the cracks, especially after the ninth-grade. With one of the highest dropout rates in the industrialized world, educators and politicians are anxiously looking for sensible and proven solutions to these problems.

Because there are so many educational partnerships with different goals and objectives, this study will attempt to see if the SAEP program is having a positive impact on the success of African-American students. This chapter delineated the purpose of this

research project and provided the set of questions that guided this study. Chapter II presents a review of the literature pertaining to the topic of educational partnerships and its impact of student success.

CHAPTER II

Literature Review

This chapter reviews the literature pertinent to educational partnerships that have had a special focus on assisting at-risk students in graduating from high school and successfully entering a two- or four-year institution of higher learning. This chapter is divided into five sections that review the literature applicable to the study of educational partnerships.

1. The Rise of educational partnerships that assist at-risk students
2. Differences between educational partnerships that focus on at-risk students and concurrent enrollment programs
3. Models of successful partnerships
4. Key factors that constitute a viable partnership
5. Factors associated with persistence and goal attainment to college success.

A Nation of Students at Risk

Before the groundbreaking work *A Nation At Risk* was published in 1983, the conceptual framework of collaborative partnerships between institutions of higher learning and public schools was not widely recognized or practiced in the United States. For the most part, public schools and institutions of higher learning were viewed as separate entities and were not expected to collaborate for the benefit of assisting students—regardless of socio-economic and cultural status—to move through the educational pipeline that traversed from elementary school through college. If students dropped out of school along the way before they reached high school or college, it was

typical of society to blame the family and/or school for this recurring problem.

On August 26 1981, Secretary of Education T.H Bell created the National Commission of Excellence in Education to examine the quality of education in the United States and to report to the nation within 18 months from the first meeting. Bell's purpose for creating the Commission was based on widespread discontent from the American public about the gradual decline of the public school system, the growing high school dropout rate in urban cities, and the lack of preparation that students were receiving compared to industrialized nations in Europe and Asia such as Germany, France, Singapore, and Japan.

As a result of this study, the Commission was able to look at America's educational problems from a global perspective and compare it against other nations from around the world. *A Nation at Risk* was the first federal document that identified the gap between expectations and performance in the United States. The dissatisfaction over quality had been building on the American scene even before the Reagan election of 1980 (Iannaccone, 1987). Some of the critical areas that the Commission was asked to analyze included:

(1) The quality of teaching and learning in our nation's public and private schools, colleges, and universities,

(2) Comparing American schools and colleges with those of other advanced nations,

(3) Evaluating the relationship between college admissions requirements and student achievement in high school,

(4) Identifying educational programs which result in notable student success in college,

(5) Assessing the degree to which major social and educational changes in the last quarter century have affected student achievement,

(6) Defining problems to overcome in pursuit of building an excellent model of education.

The report went beyond just analyzing what was wrong with American schools and showed that there was an evident connection between America's growing decline in school performance to its synchronous decline in economic performance within the world economic market. The opening charge in the report stated that, "Our Nation is at risk. Our once unchallenged preeminence in commerce, industry, science, and technological innovation is being overtaken by competitors throughout the world" (U.S. Dept. of Education, 1983).

It went on specify how other nations were quickly overtaking America in various industrial capacities:

> The risk is not only that the Japanese make automobiles more efficiently than Americans and have government subsidies for development and export. It is not just that the South Koreans recently built the world's most efficient steel mill, or that American machine tools, once the pride of the world, are being displaced by German products. It is also that these developments signify a redistribution of trained capability throughout the globe. Knowledge, learning, information, and skilled intelligence are the new raw materials of international commerce and are today spreading throughout the world as vigorously as miracle drugs, synthetic fertilizers, and blue jeans did earlier. (A Nation At Risk, 1983#)

Based on the American public's looming concern about the steady decline in educational excellence and the new economic competition that was coming from Japan

and other foreign countries, the report argued for drastic reform in the public educational system.

> If only to keep and improve on the slim competitive edge we still retain in world markets, we must dedicate ourselves to there form of our educational system for the benefit of all--old and young alike, affluent and poor, majority and minority. Learning is the indispensable investment required for success in the "information age" we are entering. (A Nation At Risk, p. 2 #)

Some of the major findings revealed in the 18-month study included the following problems:

- The amount of homework for high school seniors had decreased and grades had risen as average student achievement had been declining.
- Other industrialized nations spent three times more class hours on math, biology, chemistry, physics, and geography.
- A 1980 state-by-state survey of high school diploma requirements revealed that only eight states required high schools to offer foreign language instruction.
- Thirty-five states required only one year of mathematics, and 36 required only one year of science for a diploma.
- In 13 states, 50% or more of the units required for high school graduation were electives chosen by the student. Students were able to opt for less rigorous courses to graduate from high school.
- About 23% of the most selective colleges and universities reported that their general level of selectivity declined during the 1970s due to a decline in academic standards.

Based on the problems that were highlighted in the report, the Commission formulated nine recommendations that they felt school districts should implement immediately. Most of the recommendations were particularly aimed at improving and upgrading instructional methods in the most important curricular subjects, including English, mathematics, the sciences, foreign languages, and social studies. It also called for educators to pay more attention to including subjects that would help students achieve their occupations and vocational goals.

Despite the far reaching vision of the report, the Commission did not make any specific recommendations concerning the idea of public schools building collaborative partnerships with the greater community (i.e., business and industry, institutions of higher learning, and other community-based institutions). The only reference in the report about collaboration had to do with the ninth recommendation, which vaguely encouraged"…the consortia of educators and scientific, industrial, and scholarly societies to cooperate and improve the school curriculum" (A Nation At Risk, p. 3). Although the Commission on Excellence did not provide any concrete ideas about how collaborative partnerships could play a key role in building a stronger educational system, the report made Americans much more aware of the critical urgency needed to improve the educational standards for all children.

Policy Issues Related to Educational Reform: Status Quo vs. Agents of Change

One of the major obstacles that have stymied the proposed ideas of the Excellence Commission has been the resistance to change by certain interest groups who

wield political and economic power within their school districts. In the 1998 article "A Nation Still At Risk" the authors claimed:

> The Excellence Commission had the right diagnosis but was vague—and perhaps a bit naïve—as to the cure. They spoke of reforming our educational system in fundamental ways but they did not offer a strategy of political or structural change to turn these reforms into reality. They underestimated, too, the resilience of the status quo and the strength of the interests wedded to it. (Bennett, Fair, Finn, Flake, Hirsch, Marshall, Ravitch, 1998, p. 3)

Since that time, state governments have come up with their own policies and strategies to deal with the decline of their public school systems. However, because the U.S. government does not have sovereign authority over local and state educational systems, a unified vision in bringing about significant improvement in public education has been elusive. Some of the major educational problems that continue to exist since 1983 include the following:

- More than 10 million Americans have reached the 12th grade without having learned to read at a basic level.
- More than 20 million have reached their senior year unable to do basic math.
- Almost 25 million have reached 12th grade not knowing the essentials of U.S. history.
- More than 6 million Americans dropped out of high school altogether. (A Nation Still At Risk, p. 3)

If this trend continues to go unheeded and serious measures are not put into place to provide better educational opportunities for our youth, it is predicted that our American educational system will become a two-tiered educational model, separate and unequal.

> In the midst of our flourishing economy, we are re-creating a dual school system, separate and unequal, almost half a century after government-sanctioned segregation was declared unconstitutional. We face a widening

> and unacceptable chasm between good schools and bad, between those youngsters who get an adequate education and those who emerge from school barely able to read and write. Poor and minority children, by and large, go to worse schools, have less expected of them, are taught by less knowledgeable teachers, and have the least power to alter bad situations. Yet it's poor children who most need great schools. (Bennett, Fair, Finn, Flake, Hirsch, Marshall, Ravitch, 1998, p. 3)

Impact on Minority, Low-Income, and At-Risk Students

The United States has one of the highest high school dropout rates among all of the industrialized nations of the world, and, so far, there is no workable solution to solving this problem in the near future. An even more compelling problem has been the higher dropout rates among African-American and Hispanic boys, many of whom are being incarcerated and permanently scarred by the destabilizing nature of prison life. A recent study found that the nation's jails and prisons held one of every 142 residents in June 2002, with the majority being African-Americans (Williams, Hill, & Wilson, 2003). According to the Justice Department's Bureau of Justice Statistics, the United States has overtaken Russia as the world's number one jailer with 1.35 million inmates in state and federal prisons (Williams, Hill, & Wilson, 2003).

NCES, the primary federal resource for U.S. dropout data, reports that national dropout rates varied slightly between 1990 and 2000. Within this 10-year span, the number of students who had not received a high school diploma or an equivalency certificate fluctuated between 10.9 and 12.5 percent nationally (U.S. GAO, 2002). Other reports by NCES revealed that dropout rates varied considerably by race over this period: whites, 8 percent; African Americans, 13 percent; and Hispanics 29 percent (Kaufmann, Alt, & Chapman, 2001).

While graduation rates vary among ethnic groups and by socioeconomic status, there has been no major improvement in the dropout rate among low-income African-American and Hispanic students over the past 15 years. The high school graduation rate for African American students in 1999 was 72.9 percent, which is 3.9 points below the national average of 76.8 percent. Graduation rates for white students and for Hispanics were 82 percent and 54.9 percent, respectively (Bonsteel, 2001). And Native American students have the highest K-12 dropout rates and the lowest college-completion rates of any ethnic group in the United States.

For the year 2000, NCES reported the dropout rate for Asian/Pacific Islander students was lower than it was for students from all other racial and ethnic backgrounds. The rate for Asian/Pacific Islanders was 3.8 percent, compared with 27.8 percent for Hispanics, 13.1 percent for African Americans, and 6.9 percent for whites (Kaufmann et al., 2001). Nevertheless, one of the most challenging issues facing the educational community is the existence of gaps and differences in dropout rates between ethnic and minority groups. In 1996, 13 percent of all African Americans aged 16 to 24 were not in school and did not hold a diploma. Seventeen percent of first-generation Hispanics had dropped out of high school, including a tragic 44 percent of Hispanic immigrants in this age group. This is another lost generation. For them the risk is grave indeed (Bennett, 1998). Child poverty rates for African Americans and Hispanics are more than twice as high as poverty rates for whites (Kaufmann et al., 2000).

Social and Economic Implications of High School Dropouts

Based on the steady increase of high school dropouts, we can predict that over

the next 15 years, our economy will continue to suffer potential losses of revenue as a result of a low-skilled populace. Catterall (1985) claimed that dropouts drain the economy of much needed revenue and will cost the country over $200 billion dollars during their lifetimes in lost earnings and unrealized tax revenue. In Texas, between the 1985–86 and 2001–02 school years, the estimated cumulative costs of public school dropouts were in excess of $488 billion in forgone income, lost tax revenue, increased job training, welfare, unemployment, and payments to the criminal justice system (Johnson, 2001). Dropouts account for almost half of the heads of households on welfare (Schwartz, 1995). Orfield (2004) argued that a range of factors, including inadequate school funding, low family income, and high proportions of students with limited English language skills, characterize the public school districts of the largest U. S. cities, where only 50% of those who enter ninth grade continue on to high school graduation (Orfield, 2004).

Hale claims that the loss of taxes, loss of production and the cost of assistance provided to dropouts make the problem of high school non-completion an issue for every taxpayer" (Hale, 1998). Students classified as at-risk candidates for dropping out of high school frequently have no form of health insurance. Research has indicated that dropouts are more likely to have health problems, engage in criminal activities, and become dependent on welfare and other government-related programs than high school graduates (Rumberger, 1987).

Latina Girls Have Highest Dropout Rate

Due to a number of social and cultural factors beyond their control, Hispanic girls

have the highest dropout rate in the nation for a number of reasons; however, the major factor is pregnancy. A third of nine- to fifteen-year-old Hispanic girls surveyed by the Academy of Educational Development cited pregnancy or marriage as the reason for dropping out of high school. Recent reports ranked Texas 46 of 50 in terms of having the highest drop out rates among Hispanic girl students. Other factors cited for the disproportionate high school dropout rate of Latina girls are marriage, gender roles, stereotyping, family demands, and economic status. Attitudes of teachers, a lack of proficiency in English, peer pressure, and a lack of role models are also contributing factors to this disturbing trend. Despite the alarming rate of dropouts among Hispanic girls, there is no public outcry and little is being done to remedy this situation.

Other Major Problems Facing Educational Reform

In addition to the dropout problems that are facing the low-income, at-risk minority populations, one generic problem that is plaguing colleges from coast to coast is remediation. While community colleges are experiencing the highest number of students who are in severe need of taking developmental courses, it was reported that over half of the students entering the California state university system are in need of remedial courses in reading, writing, and mathematics. According to a 1996 study by the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES), over 25% of all students entering college needed remedial education, or courses that raise a student's general competency to the minimum required levels in the subject areas determined by a college or university. In some states, as many as 50 percent of high school graduates need remediation in their first year of postsecondary work (Michelau, 2000).

Some of the negative outcomes surrounding remediation are that some students never complete their development courses in college and, therefore, are not able to opportunity to graduate. Furthermore, employers report difficulty in finding people who have the skills, knowledge, habits, and attitudes they require for technologically sophisticated positions.

Theoretical Framework

While there has been a voluminous amount of research done to explore academic persistence and retention among minority students at the college level, there has been little research about this topic at the high school level. Despite the primary differences between colleges and high schools, some of the student success theories posed by Tinto, Rendon, and Pascarella (1994, 1998) for college students, equally apply to high school students. In Tinto's (1975, 1987) model of academic persistence, the basic premise is that social and academic integration are essential to student retention. Tinto (1993) notes that his persistence model is an "interactional system" where both students and institutions through social and educational communities are, over time, continually interacting with one another in a variety of formal and informal situations. Key to the interactionalist view is that persistence is contingent on the extent to which students become incorporated (integrated) into the social and academic communities of the college.

Tinto (1975) blends elements of cost-benefit analysis with Durkheim's theory of egoistic suicide to explain the "pull" and "push" of external factors on dropout decisions. Hurtado (1997) advocates that in order to understand cultural transformations in an increasingly complex and multicultural society, as is the case when students from one

group enter the sphere of social engagement of another group, requires not an assimilation/acculturation framework, but a social engagement model. Hurtado (1994) has employed a social engagement framework to study the participation of Latino parents in school. His analysis of Latino parents' participation in school is quite similar to how one might analyze college student retention. The research has shown that working-class Latino students are not as likely to get involved in the academic and social domains of the college as often as whites do. Engagement is usually defined as participating in clubs and organizations, meeting with faculty in and out of class. He further argues that this narrow definition of student engagement is predominately based in the dominant group's perspective and not from the Latino students' view of what is possible and desirable for them. Similarly, Rendón (1994), Jalomo (1995), and Terenzini et al. (1994) have found that involvement is extremely difficult for nontraditional students of low socioeconomic working-class backgrounds and that both in and out of class validation were essential to their engagement and persistence. Validation for minority students is a powerful, interactive process and a validating agent. Much of the validation occurred out of class (with friends, parents, spouses), substantiating that there are other forms of engagement that can have a positive impact on persistence.

Academic Preparation

Because many first-generation college students come from urban public schools with poor academic programs, a large number of Hispanic and African-American students have not been exposed to a college preparatory curriculum that gives them the academic skills needed for college success. Because many of these students have not

been seen as college material, they have not been encouraged by school counselors, teachers, or administrators to take part in the courses and guidance activities that will help them successfully compete for college admission (Fallon, 1997). As a result of this persisting trend, many first-generation students who experience weak academic preparation do poorly on college admissions tests (Fallon, 1997).

Kurlaender (2006) claims that previous academic achievement is a significant factor in the college choice process. As a result, academic preparation influences high school achievement and performance on the aptitude tests like the SAT and ACT. Since both of these are used widely by colleges in describing their range of competitive applicants and, eventually, as a basis for screening applicants, students often self-select the colleges to which they apply to reflect what they believe the colleges will consider. Colleges encourage this practice by publishing the test scores and class rank of their entering class and, sometimes, by directly discouraging applications from students with low test scores or with poor high school records. Moreover students tend to self-select institutions with enrolled students of similar aptitude as themselves (Chapman, 1981, p. 493).

Financial Aid

Financial aid has been found to be an important criterion in the college choice process, especially among the Latino population (McDonough & Antonio, 1996). Perna (2000) proposes that "low levels of financial resources may constrain a family's ability to pay the costs of the investment and consequently realize benefits that exceed the costs."(p. 125). Chapman (1981) argues that college cost is more of an influence on

whether a student attends a postsecondary institution. Financial limitations, along with college costs, restrict a student's belief on their decision to enroll in college. Swail, Cabrera, and Lee (2004) found that over half of Latino students come from families with incomes less than $25,000 a year. Fallon (1997) states:

> Families with a limited income and a lack of awareness of financial aid availability and procedures may view college as too expensive. They may fear the financial burden that a college education entails. Not only is there the burden of tuition costs, but an additional burden can be seen in lost wages that might have been earned had the so or daughter not attended college. (p. 13)

Fallon (1997) believes that even though financial aid programs have made college affordable through grants, loans, and scholarships, many first-generation students are concerned with accepting loans that must be repaid later (Fallon, 1997).

Parental Support

Parental support is also a variable in the college choice process. Parents are able to influence the college selection, location, and costs along with their child's living arrangements (Fallon, 1997). Research has found that a mother has more of a significant influence on a student's college choice than the father." Mothers tended to be the parent who were most involved in their child's college planning" (Fallon, 1997, p. 25) and "were of primary importance for students from single-parent families" (Bers & Galowich, 2002, p. 5).

Perna (2000) and Fallon (1997) indicate parental support is highly correlated with a child's educational attainment level, which differs between first-generation and second-generation students. A parents' educational level reflects the level of encouragement they

express toward their child's educational aspiration and the depth of experience they provide in acquiring information about a college education.

> With few high education role models in their home or community, first generation students may miss out on the informal exposure to college life that can be obtained by listening to significant adults talk about their college experiences. Even its specific vocabulary-for example, credit hours, GPA, bursar, dean, general education requirement-may be foreign to students who are the first in their families to attend college. First generation students may not know how to select classes, plan schedules, take notes in large lecture classes, tackle assignments, read textbooks, approach professors, or budget their own time. (Fallon, 1997, p. 17)

Fallon discusses that parents who do not have a college education tend to be concerned that their child "may not return to the home community and that the child may lose touch with his or her own culture" and "will accept the values of the middle class, predominantly Euro-American college environment." (p. 11). However, Talavera-Bustillos (1998) believes Latino parents expect their children to attend college regardless of their lack of experience in college enrollment.

High School Counselors

High school counselors are also reported to be influential in the college choice process. Fallon (1997) discusses that they can be influential in helping minority, economically disadvantaged, and first-generation students through the preparation of pursuing a college degree. They provide the guidance to help students develop a college mind-set, consider postsecondary options, and prepare for higher education.

> Counselors can introduce them (students) to postsecondary educational opportunities and related topics. Such topics as the importance of high school course selections, college testing, financial aid, decision making, and values clarification can help students become aware of their options. (Fallon, 1997. p. 31)

Fallon also stresses that counselors are "vitally important in ensuring that these students and their parents receive adequate information that will address their needs" (p. 37).

The Origin of Educational Partnerships

As public high school graduation rates continue to decline in the United States, community colleges are taking a more active lead in developing functional partnerships with local public schools in order to increase graduation rates and prevent high levels of remediation happening on college campuses all across America. While the interest of outside groups in public education is not new, a number of developments have increased national interest in this growing phenomena. For example, lifelong learning by the workforce has brought business and education into partnership; the articulation of school-university programs, as well as pre-service and in-service teacher training education has burgeoned between schools and universities; and federal legislation for Goals 2000 encouraged local groups to create "whole community partnerships to improve teaching and learning"(U.S. Department of Education, 1994, p.3). However, collaborations between colleges and schools did not really become a national movement until colleges began to suffer a decline in enrollment in the late 1970s. As demographic projections suggested that minorities and adults would dominate the growing sectors of the student population and that the traditional college population would diminish, college administrators urged admissions officers, as well as faculties, to concentrate on collaborations with the schools (Gross, 1988).

While there are many types of college/high school educational partnerships that

have been established over the past 20 years—most notably the dual-enrollment model—very few have focused on targeting the low-income, at-risk populations who are largely confined to inner-city environments. This paper will distinguish between the two types of models, and focus primarily on the merits of collaborative partnerships that assist at-risk students.

Seamless Education—The Golden Pipeline of Opportunity

O'Hair and Veugelers (2005) contend that school-university networks are becoming an important method to enhance educational renewal and student achievement from pre-kindergarten through to graduate education. It is also an opportunity for schools and universities to work together as equal partners to promote high-quality learning environments, recognizing the benefits and challenges of developing a seamless education from pre-kindergarten through graduate education (O'Hair & Veugelers, 2005). Lambert (1998) compares a true educational partnership to a network, stating that networks share ownership and develop democratic leadership by addressing the needs of their participants and by building high levels of skillfulness and participation.

This collective vision helps develop authentic and democratic practices as evidenced by the sharing of best practices, establishing trust and cooperation, critiquing struggles, sharing power and critical decisions, examining and acting on issues of equity, and serving others (O'Hair, McLaughlin, & Reitzug, 2000). School-university partnerships can also be viewed as organized collaboratives that bring university and public school teachers and administrators together to promote more effective preparation of pre-service teachers and, at the same time, renew conditions and curricula in the public

schools (Osguthorpe, Harris, R. Harris, M. Harris, African American, 1995).

Educational Pipeline—Inextricably Linked

More than ever before, public schools and higher education in the United States have become inextricably linked in the way they work to improve graduation standards, so that more students can enter college and achieve higher levels of success. As a result, colleges spend substantial resources to provide remedial education to college students in subjects that students should have learned in high school. Elementary and secondary schools hire teachers who have too often been inadequately prepared by colleges and universities for today's culturally diverse classrooms. In many urban school districts, African-Americans and Latinos drop out before they graduate and this has a negative impact on society.

Today there is a growing recognition that schools and higher education institutions share responsibility for these problems and that neither has the ability or the resources to solve them alone. One response is that schools and colleges have turned increasingly to collaborative approaches in trying to resolve common problems.

Middle College High School (MCHS)—The Pioneer in Collaborative Partnerships

The trend of collaborative partnerships between institutions of higher learning and public schools was first initiated over 30 years ago at LaGuardia Community College in New York. In the 1970s, community colleges, growing nationally at the rate of one or two per week, provided the main entryway to higher education for urban minority

students. (Wechsler, 2001). However, it has only been recently that more public attention about the merits of this system has been widely discussed.

The first middle college high school was funded by the Carnegie Corporation and the Fund for the Improvement of Postsecondary Education. The intent was to design a school to reduce the dropout rate in urban high schools, to prepare students more effectively for work or college, and to attract more students to higher education (Lieberman, 1985). Known as the middle college high school or early college high school, these early hybrid schools were initially viewed as an idiosyncratic experiment in educational circles to stem the rising tide of high school dropouts. Since that time, the middle college high school concept has become nationally recognized for its ability to create unique learning environments for at-risk youth, which in turn has improved school attendance, raised grade point averages, and significantly boosted graduation rates. As a nationally organized consortium, these schools have enabled thousands of potential dropouts to succeed at high school and enter institutions of higher learning and advanced training (Cunningham and Wagonlander, 2000).

Other developments that precipitated a continued interest in collaborative educational partnerships can be attributed to the passing of the Educational Partnerships Act in 1988. The Educational Partnerships Act (EPP) encouraged the creation of educational partnerships to demonstrate their contribution to educational reform. Despite Congress' move to cut funding for the EPP, educational partnerships still continued to proliferate all throughout the United States among institutions of higher learning and public schools (Charp, 2002).

MCHS Model—Growing Impetus for Other Collaborative Partnerships

Due to the decline of public school education in the United States, the failure to educate low-income and minority children has led educators, political leaders, and community groups to foster strategies to implement collaborative partnerships such as the middle college high school (MCHS) model—commonly known as the early college high school (ECHS)—which has proven to be successful and outlived many other models in the nation (Chen, Konantz, Rosenfeld, & Frost, 2000).

Because of the growing interest in this topic—due in part to President Bush's new plan to propose support for community colleges and technical colleges that form partnerships with local high schools and businesses—a new wave of partnership proposals is being considered (Evelyn, 2004).

Differences between the MCHS Model and the Dual Credit Model

In the same way that the middle college high school model has sparked a growing level of interest in communities to consider developing more collaborative partnerships between public schools and institutions of higher education, dual enrollment programs are also being embraced by many communities as a viable alternative to regular high school programs. The major difference between the middle/early college high school programs and the dual enrollment programs is that the dual enrollment programs typically serve students who are academically motivated and who are already enrolled in high school honor/advanced placement or international baccalaureate programs, while the

middle/early college high school programs typically serve and encourage more low-income and minority students to prepare for college (Chmelynski, 2004).

In most cases, dual-credit programs have been designed for the sole purpose of allowing high school students the opportunity of enrolling in community colleges, concurrently, while finishing up their last year in high school. Although dual-credit programs have been in existence for over 20 years, it has only been recently that these programs have become available to many students throughout the country. Dual enrollment programs are fast becoming a major part of the academic fabric of community colleges.

While there is no consistent national data on the number of high school students participating in dual-enrollment programs, there is some strong evidence that these numbers are growing from year to year. The National Center for Education Statistics (1998) reported that the number of students under the age of 18 who enrolled in public two-year colleges on a part-time basis increased from 96,913 in the fall of 1993 to 123,039 in the fall of 1995. In comparison, the U.S. Department of Education released a report in 2003 that revealed that half of all colleges and universities in the nation enrolled high school students in courses for college credit during the 2002-2004 academic years, which translates to about 813,000 students. That accounts for about five percent of high school students nationwide.

Based on the success of these programs, U.S. Secretary of Education Margaret Spellings said, “We are pleased to see more high school students pursuing dual enrollment opportunities, and the results in these reports underscore the significance of

President Bush's $125 million proposal to increase access to dual enrollment for at-risk students" (U.S. Dept. of Education, 2005).

Funding for the Middle College High School Model

In an effort to strengthen and solidly support the early college high school programs across the United States, the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation has already proposed to award $29.6 million in grants to eight organizations for the purpose of expanding the early college high school network in 25 states. Since 2001, the early college high school network has received more than $124 million in support from the Gates Foundation, the Carnegie Corp. of New York, and the W.K. Kellogg Foundation (African American Issues in Higher Education, 2004). Based on the growing popularity of these types of educational programs and the national urgency to increase graduation rates among at-risk students, community colleges involved in collaborative partnerships can expect to receive a rise in private donations in the near future.

Seattle Has Adopted the MCHS Model

Seattle is one of the cities that decided to adopt the middle college high school concept developed and patterned after LaGuardia Middle College in New York. Other examples of the middle college high school are located on campuses throughout the United States: Cuyahoga Community College (Cleveland, OH), Contra Costa College (San Pablo, CA), El Centro College (Dallas, TX), Illinois Central College (Peoria, IL), Los Angeles Southwest College (Los Angeles, CA), and Shelby State Community College (Memphis, TN). However, Seattle's MCHS program is unique in that it is a high school dropout retrieval program.

Other Models of Success: The El Paso Collaborative

Formed in 1994, The El Paso Collaborative was a partnership between the University of Texas at El Paso (UTEP) and the three school districts—El Paso, Socorro, and Ysleta. The collaborative helped to restructure both the professional development training for existing teachers, as well as the teacher preparation for education majors at the University of Texas at El Paso. From 1994 to 1998 the percentage of students passing the reading, writing, and math (Texas Assessment of Academic Skills) tests in the school rose from 53.9% to 86.8%—a 32% increase (Drew, 2001). The collaborative funding came from a variety of sources that included the University, Pew Charitable Trusts, and grants from Coca-Cola and the National Science Foundation.

Project GRAD

Project GRAD, which stands for Graduation Really Achieves Dreams, was formed in Houston in the 1980s in an effort to assist disadvantaged youth to get through school successfully and ultimately enter college. The program has spread to over 73 high schools in the Houston area, and graduation rates have risen dramatically. Project GRAD started with a single high school, Jefferson Davis High School, which was one of the lowest performing schools in the district. At the time, fewer than 40% of the ninth graders earned diplomas in four years, and gang violence and teenage pregnancies were high. Since then, teen pregnancies have declined, college enrollment has jumped to 62% compared with 13% for the school district as a whole, and the graduation rate exceeds the district average and the high school completion rates for Hispanics nationally (American Council on Education, 2003).

LA PASS

Educators and community activists agree with the proverb that it does take "a whole village to educate a child." The challenge is to adapt village strategies for the geographically largest mega-city in the country and bring together its diverse stakeholders as one big family to educate the child (Williams & Mabey, 1995). One of the organizations working on behalf of at-risk populations through educational partnerships is LA PASS. The partnership works to build bridges and sustain relationships within communities by implementing a K-16 pipeline strategy across educational sectors. This program has the support of the Los Angeles Community College District, and channels its resources to locations that are the most disenfranchised and hardest hit by unemployment, crime, and deprivation. They target neighborhoods defined by city and business leaders as neglected areas in the aftermath of the recent civil unrest, K-12 institutions with low achievement indicators, and two or three community colleges with low transfer rates.

Through the various educational consortiums, institutional leaders and college/university faculty try to foster educational equity, student transfers, and professional development across institutions and systems. As a collaborative partnership, LA PASS seeks to develop and expand its resources, involving community-based organizations and collaboratives throughout the country. The partnership is committed to long-term strategies that are comprehensive in scope and vision.

San Antonio Education Partnership

Since its inception in 1988, SAEP has developed into a mobilizing force at the forefront of assisting low-income students in the city of San Antonio to graduate from high school and attend college. The program has awarded millions of dollars in scholarships to nearly 6,800 students. Most of this funding has been received from San Antonio's business community, and more recently the City of San Antonio. One of the major players in funding has been H-E-B (Texas-based grocery store), which has committed to awarding over $1.3 million in scholarships for five new high schools on an annual basis. Another program that was launched in 1993 and has secured millions of dollars for SAEP is the Adopt-A-School Program. Since its inception, total donations have exceeded $3 million for scholarships. Total donations awarded overall from Fall 1989 to Spring 2005 has been over $8 million dollars.

Career Beginnings – Vocational Collaborative for At-risk Students

Career Beginnings is a targeted dropout prevention program that works with at-risk youth who are still in school. Career Beginnings programs are designed to assist high school juniors from low-income families to graduate from high school and get full-time jobs or attend college. Career Beginnings programs, coordinated through the Center for Human Resources at Brandeis University, now operate at 25 colleges and universities that collectively serve more than 2,400 students. Program components include mentors, summer employment, job skills development, college application assistance, and a variety of support services.

Achieving a College Education (ACE) and Florida's Seminole Consortium

Other model programs that have gained national recognition and are serving as an example of exemplary partnerships include:

- The Achieving a College Education (ACE) Program at Maricopa Community College in Arizona. ACE is a collaborative 2+2+2 program established in 1987 to increase the number of at-risk students to receive baccalaureate degrees.
- Florida's Seminole Consortium is a dynamic partnership between the Seminole county schools and Seminole Community College. This program was designed to help increase the pool of skilled applicants in telecommunications. The program focuses on math, science, and electronics.
- The Puente Project at the University of California operates in 18 California schools and is aimed at increasing high school retention and graduation rates for Hispanic students (Rendon, 2000).
- The state of Maryland has established a K-16 initiative for the purpose of fostering transitions from school to college as a way to assure college readiness for more high school graduates (Nunley, 1999).
- The state of Georgia has implemented a pilot program called Postsecondary Readiness Enrichment Program (PREP) at Georgia Perimeter College, a multi-campus two-year institution in Atlanta, Georgia. The program is designed to provide guidance and counseling support to at-risk high school

students (Lords, E., 2000).

Obstacles to Developing Seamless Relationships Between Community Partners

Despite the growing interest that educational institutions have for implementing successful collaborative partnerships, the envisioned seamless working relationships between K-12 districts and institutions of higher learning, however desirable, are difficult to achieve (Azinger, 2000). One of the main obstacles cited by Azinger is that K-12 administrators do not always feel that collaboration with institutions of higher learning will help address the issues that demand their priority attention as school leaders. Other problems that were cited as major barriers are:

- The logistical challenges that school districts face when attempting to establish workable partnerships with community colleges.
- Differences in organizational culture shared by both institutions.
- The lack of custodial care shown to K-12 students when they go to institutions of higher learning (Zinger, 2000).

Helgot (2001) asserts that frustration develops when high school staff perceives their relationship with the colleges and universities as less than equal. They also feel that they are important to colleges and universities only when their graduates are needed and can be ignored when there is no such need. Sirotnik and Goodlad (1988) contend that there are troublesome organizational and structural problems in school-university partnerships. These potential problems range from meshing regularities such as annual

and daily work schedules to creating a governing and managing structure that represents the best interests of the participants (Sirtonik & Goodlad, 1988).

High Teacher Turnover in Struggling Public Schools

Other obstacles that have impeded this process are the high rate of turnover in the struggling public schools. In partnership between a high school in California's central valley and a neighboring community college, which won a five year $300,000 grant from the state, 85% of those involved in the project left during the second year. The principal, the vice-principal, and most of the best teachers were transferred to other schools. Before the end of the five-year period, the partnership had fizzled. In its effort to improve public schools, institutions of higher learning find that they are sometimes faced with resistance from teachers who feel that they are answering to two bosses, the college and the school district (Morse, Cray, Berryman, Fowler, & Time, 2001).

Targeting Students in Their Formative Years

In order for institutions of higher learning and public schools to build successful transitional partnerships, they will need to develop programs to target students beginning in early elementary school (Watson, 1993). Rendon (2003) agrees with this view and explains that relationship-centered models that engage institutions of higher learning with feeder K-12 schools should be created in order to design institutional outreach (i.e., bridge-type, career, tech-prep, youth apprenticeship) that target students in early grades. Chen, Konantz, Rosenfeld, and Frost (2000) recommend that partnerships should adopt four major goals:

- Prevent disadvantaged students from dropping out of high school.

- Improve student's self-esteem and self-concept by providing a supportive, academically challenging environment.
- Facilitate college attendance, offer students additional support from college and faculty.
- Enhance college and career options by exploring with them broad curricula and workforce preparation.

> In this time when learning is being promoted as the central mission of education, teachers from community colleges and high schools have a great opportunity to combine work… and focus their talents and skills on the outcomes of student success. (Garmon, 2000)

Identifying Effective Educational Partnerships

Partnerships are collaborative efforts to achieve mutually agreed upon goals and objectives by matching resources to identified needs of the school. However, it is equally important for the partnering organization to understand the advantages of a partnership to the respective organization. Crucial to progressive partnerships is the extent of the commitment of the partners. This commitment should be periodically reviewed, focused on the impact of plans targeted for student achievement (Mclean & Robinson, 2001).

Effective partnerships provide schools with resources, training, and expertise that will enable students to link learning with workplace expectations and preparation. Through the collaborative efforts of committed partners, many and diverse opportunities are provided to prepare students for success as they progress in school. Partnerships benefit educators in the following ways:

- Provide additional classroom resources—technological, human, material.

- Improve teacher awareness of technological advancements—through modeling and demonstration.
- Increase student motivation—provide interesting and "real-life" examples.
- Increase awareness of skills needed for workplace success.
- Increase staff development opportunities—often offer training opportunities on-site.
- Provide resources and networking opportunities.
- Provide public relations opportunities—help to inform about school goals and priorities.
- Provide incentive programs—serve to motivate learners.
- Provide employment and job shadowing opportunities—involve students in the work place.

An effective partnership depends on clear and precise goals. The advantages to be gained by each stakeholder group must be clearly defined. Furthermore, the elements of a successful collaboration require a strong commitment and dedication of resources by all stakeholders to the following:

- Respect for diversity
- Support of the district's mission goals and objectives
- Improvement and advancement of learning
- Volunteer/tutor support
- Technical assistance
- Measurements for student performance

- Personnel development
- Professional enhancement seminars

Clear expectations, consistency, shared communication, linked resources, cooperation, and open and continuous dialogue are essential in the design and implementation of an effective partnership. This is the foundation for building a sense of community.

The Progressive vs. Traditional Partnership Model

In delineating the differences between the progressive and traditional partnership model, the progressive model places the child and the children's family at the center of the partnership. As a result of this structural approach, the model expects for schools, families, and communities to become morally supportive, educative, and interdependent, as planning for the care and education of children by families, neighborhoods, agencies, and schools requires many kinds of services and supports, together with synchronized strategies for change.

On the other hand, the traditional partnership model differs significantly from the progressive model. Traditional partnerships center on reforming schools, focusing on individual children, and improving the preparation of educators (Lawson, Flora, Lloyd, Briar, Ziegler, Kettlewell, 1995). They also tend to focus on the two-way relationship between the university and school, and not get involved in inviting other community partners into the circle of collaboration.

Nonetheless, families are treated like clients, as opposed to partners, and outside agencies are not invited to participate in providing services that would be beneficial in

enhancing the success of the student.

Table 1: Two Approaches to Partnerships

	Traditional Model	**Progressive Model**
Purpose	Simultaneous improvements in the schools and programs for education for educators	Synchronized changes in the organizations serving children and families
Theory of Change	1. School of reform and renewal as a stand alone category 2. Reformist bias: improving existing systems	1. School renewal as one part of community development. 2. Transformational bias: within and across systems change
University's Orientation	Research, Development, and Diffusion	Design, Development, and Research
Kinds of Collaboration	Primarily two-way: University - school	Multiple ways: Families, Universities, corporations, agencies, schools, business
Role of Families	Clients	Partners

Taken from: Building Links with Families and Communities

(Lawson, Flora, Lloyd, Briar, Zieglar, Kettlewell, 1995)

Because of the central importance that progressive partnerships place on the families and the community to support the children throughout their odyssey of striving for academic excellence, the progressive model can be compared to the African proverb: "It takes a whole village to raise the child." The partnership can be conceived as a village because it is open-minded to embracing new partners, and new changes that are conducive to the positive growth and betterment of the children.

Factors that Affect Goal Attainment - The Family's Role in the Partnership Model

In the past, parents and teachers have been typically viewed by society as the primary culprits behind the abysmal failure of the public school system. However with the rise of the new progressive partnership movement, parents and families are looked upon differently. In the new model, they are viewed as the most significant partners in the learning and development of children (Lawson, Flora, Lloyd, Briar, Ziegler, Kettlewell, 1995).

Parents play an important role in how children perceive and cope with school, and they influence the decisions children make. Children whose parents are actively involved with their schooling are less likely to experience attendance problems and are more likely to graduate (Rumberger, 2001; Schwartz, 1995). The majority of researchers believe that parents provide the encouragement and stability that is vital for a student's success (Bryk & Thum, 1989; McNeal, 1999; Rumberger, 2001).

Recent studies have confirmed that strong relationships between students and parents can decrease the likelihood of dropping out of school at any level (Rumberger, 2001). Family-related factors that place children at risk include a dysfunctional home life, no parental involvement, low parental expectations, a non-English-speaking home environment, ineffective parenting or abuse, and high mobility (Wells, 1990). Other studies have shown that when schools work together with families to support learning, children tend to succeed not just in school, but throughout life. Henderson and Berla (1994) claim students from low-income families and diverse multicultural backgrounds

can expect to accrue great results from supportive partnerships that consist of the following benefits:

- Higher grades and test scores
- Better attendance and more homework done
- Fewer placements in special education
- More positive attitudes and behavior
- Higher graduation rates
- Greater enrollment in postsecondary education

In return, schools and communities profit from collaborative partnerships in the following ways:

- Improved teacher morale
- Higher ratings of teachers and parents
- More support from families
- Higher student achievement
- Better reputations in their communities (Henderson & Berla, 1994).

Fundamental Ways to Strengthen and Increase Family Involvement

Because the participation of the family is crucial to the academic success of low-income students, parents should be welcomed and involved in school events as early in the process as possible. Some of the strategies to get parents actively involved in school functions would include:

- Building family memberships on subcommittees
- Get the parents involved on parent teams that are involved in planning events for the PTA and other functions
- Examine the barriers to parent/family involvement
- Provide a Staff-Parent Training for parent/family involvement.

These are just some of the proactive measures that partnerships can take to keep the parents and families involved in helping their children attain academic excellence and support (Joyner, Ben-Avie, Comer, 2004).

Summary

Collaborative partnerships can be viewed as essential mechanisms toward helping low-income students from diverse cultural backgrounds attain academic success. However, there are organizational pre-conditions that support successful collaboration. Reed and Ceja (1987) argue that when the goals of partnering organizations are aligned and there is support for collaboration and strategic planning during the early stages of a project, participants are more likely to be able to build a strong foundation for long-term collaborative activity (Reed and Ceja, 1987).

Studies have shown that there is a predictable sequence of steps that collaborative partnerships should take in order to ensure that they are implemented successfully. Grey (1985) states that there are three stages of collaboration which include (1) problem setting, (2) direction setting, and (3) structuring. In the problem setting stage, it is important for stakeholders to recognize the complexity of the problem and the interdependence of the organizations undertaking the joint effort. In the direction setting

stage, stakeholders work together to gather information and develop a strategic plan. In the structuring stage, structures and processes must be established to accomplish shared goals (Grey, 1985).

Jones (2002) claims that, ultimately, successful partnerships change the learning environment and opportunities for students. In turn, communities offer students authentic experiences that help develop civic pride, a sense of how business interests are important to community development, and how agencies support population. As a result of this synergy, school boards and individual schools seek partnerships to support students, provide students with interesting and authentic activities, and allow young people to serve their communities (Jones, 2002). In the end, the biggest influence on the success of low-income children will be the diligent involvement of their parents. The first and broadest type of involvement encompasses the many general ways in which parents and families support their children's education, both at home and at school. This will include reading to children, involving them in activities outside of the school, cooking, and shopping with them—all these constitute parental involvement in education (Jackson, Martin, and Stocklinski, 2004). As true partners in this educational collaborative, the parents role can not be taken lightly.

CHAPTER III

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This chapter describes the design used to conduct this study. The research methodology is discussed and detailed descriptions of the sample, instruments, and methods of data analysis are provided. As stated in Chapter I, this study was an attempt to answer the following research questions:

1) What specific external factors do Hispanic and African American students enrolled in the SAEP program identify as contributing to their success in graduating from the program (i.e., family support, role model, mentor, and friends)?
2) What are the specific reasons that Hispanic and African American students choose to enroll in the SAEP program (i.e., promise of financial support through scholarships, counseling and program support, exposure through activities outside of high school)?
3) What specific institutional/internal factors do Hispanic and African American students enrolled in the SAEP program identify as contributing to student success (i.e., advisors on campus, scholarship incentives, campus tours, summer remediation program)?
4) How do Hispanic and African American students compare in respect to:
    a. External factors (family support, role models, mentors)?
    b. The specific reasons they joined the program (i.e., programs, counseling)?
    c. Institutional/internal factors (i.e., advisors on campus, scholarship

incentives, campus tours, summer remediation program)?

In order to find answers to these research questions, the following research design was used in the field.

Description of Methodological Method

In an attempt to answer these questions from the viewpoint of the participants in the study, as well as to compare through statistical analysis the rate of retention of students entering college successfully, this study was designed using both quantitative and qualitative approaches. This included a transcript analysis and a student survey that included nine open-ended questions. According to Roberts, using a dual approach in researching a question provides the researcher with a multi-dimensional perspective about the issue he/she is trying to investigate (Roberts, 2002). The methodological implication of having multiple realities is that the research questions cannot be definitively established before the study begins. In this regard, the perceptions of a variety of types of persons must be sought (Merten, 2005).

While some theorists argue that using two types of research methods is counter-productive and not as feasible as using one method, other researchers such as Teddlie and Tashakkori (2002) argue that if framed well, the data pulled from these two methods can provide the researcher with deeper insights and may even raise more questions. Some of the weaknesses of using only a qualitative approach to answer questions are that it often lacks a quantitative foundation and leaves the research with only personal insights and feelings of the participants. On the other hand, quantitative research provides empirical data collection and analysis, but does not offer a human perspective about why something

is happening a certain way.

Firestone (1987) identified two groups in the qualitative and quantitative debate: the "purists" and the "pragmatists" (see also Tashakkori & Teddle, 1998). The purists believe that the two method types are incompatible because they are inextricably linked to paradigms that make different assumptions about the world and what constitutes valid research. Thus, they claim that there is a logical relationship between the principles inherent in the paradigm and the methods chosen, and consequently, that epistemology informs method. The pragmatists do not agree. To them, methods are a collection of techniques that are not inherently linked to any paradigmatic assumptions. Thus, for the pragmatists, both method types can be associated with the attributes of a paradigm.

On the other hand, Nau (1995) says that in some cases qualitative and quantitative methods used in conjunction may provide complementary data sets that together give a more complete picture than can be obtained using either method singly.

Sells, Smith, and Sprenkle (1995) also confirm that quantitative and qualitative methods "build upon each other." This again is in the *complementary* mode, rather than upon the integration of both methods. Triangulation is often called upon to explain the integration of quantitative and qualitative methods, but as Bryman (1992) points out, in spite of its intuitive appeal, triangulation is by no means unproblematic.

Winter affirms that there are differences that exist between quantitative and qualitative research in what they attempt to research. Quantitative research limits itself to what can be measured or quantified and qualitative research attempts to "pick up the pieces" of the unquantifiable, personal, in depth, descriptive and social aspects of the

world. Many of the allegations of invalidity from both sides can be attributed to a failure to recognize the purposes to which each methodology is suited.

McKereghan and Ferch (1998) state that one difficulty, among many, with the quantitative/qualitative research paradigm is that it exemplifies what philosophers call an either/or dichotomy. Research must be either quantitative or qualitative. They further explain that it is important that researchers avoid reifying pure abstract concepts and treating them as if they are real rather than ideal. They propose that quantitative and qualitative research are the ideal ends of a continuum along which actual research takes place, and conclude that if each aspect of research were plotted along such different planes, our model (paradigm) of social research would be multi-dimensional—i.e., much richer and more complex (McKereghan and Ferch, 1998).

Other researchers like Schmied (1993) affirm that the use of multi-method approaches can be very useful in expanding the breadth of information that the use of more than one method can provide. He further notes that a stage of qualitative research is often a precursor for quantitative analysis, since before linguistic phenomena can be classified and counted; the categories for classification must first be identified.

Roberts (2002) states that the use of both quantitative and qualitative data collection and analysis techniques may not always be justified by recourse to the claim of triangulation. The methods in a research design may be *complementary*, but not always *integrated*, as it is recognized that the two methods generate different types of data, and cannot be expected to achieve a rounded unity. However, the relative merits of the two approaches may be expected to assist in both the clarification of and explanation of social

action and meaning (Roberts, 2002). Teddlie and Tashakkori (2002) argue that mixed method have particular value when the researcher is trying to solve a problem that is present in a complex educational or social context.

Participants

The participants of this study consisted of 30 Hispanic students and 12 African-American students who were enrolled in the SAEP program in high schools throughout San Antonio School District and who attended college in one of the colleges or universities in the city of San Antonio between the years 2000 to 2004. These students initially became aware of the SAEP program in the high school they attended and signed the commitment agreement that guaranteed them a scholarship to attend college upon graduation from high school if they met the criteria of an 80% academic grade point average and a 90% attendance rate. Most of these students lived and attended high school on the east side of San Antonio. As a result of their geographical location, many of these students have attended St. Philip's College, San Antonio College, and Palo Alto College. Although all students in the San Antonio school district are eligible to receive the SAEP scholarship regardless of income or race, this study will focus on Hispanic and African-youth because both groups make up over 97% of its participants.

Institutional Setting

The study was conducted by phone with students who were currently enrolled at St. Philip's College, San Antonio College, and Palo Alto College in San Antonio, Texas. St. Philip's College, Palo Alto College, and San Antonio College were selected for this study because the majority of the Hispanic and African-American students enrolled in the

SAEP program prefer to attend these colleges after graduating from high school as opposed to the other two colleges (Northwest Vista and Northeast College) in the Alamo Community College District. Studies have shown that most of the African-American students who are eligible to receive the SAEP scholarship do not attend colleges or universities in San Antonio, and prefer to enroll in historically African American colleges outside of San Antonio such as Huston-Tillotson in Austin, or in cities like Houston or Atlanta, Georgia where there is a larger African-American population.

St. Philip's College

St. Philip's College was founded in 1898 as a sewing school for African American girls and, over time, transformed into an institution of higher learning for the African American community. It was established as a college in 1945, and eventually became a part of the Alamo Community College District in 1982. It is recognized both as a historically-African American institution and as a Hispanic-serving institution. St. Philip's currently has over 8000 students and is one of the fastest growing and most diverse community colleges in Texas.

Palo Alto College

Palo Alto College was founded in 1985 with the mission of providing higher education in the south side of San Antonio with the goal of transferring students and preparing them for the workforce. In the past 20 years, Palo Alto has excelled in its transfer programs for Hispanic students. It currently has the highest transfer rate in Texas for Hispanics. The average transfer rate for Hispanic students in Texas is 8.9%—while at Palo Alto College it is 38%.

Some of the newest programs offered at Palo Alto are in Academic Computer Technology, Aviation Management, Criminal Justice, Environmental Studies, Electro-Mechanical Technology, Health Professions, Logistics, Nursing, Teacher Education, and Turf-grass Management.

Palo Alto College has been known as the south side's “Heart of the Community” and has educated thousands of students who have become successful. In the 21st century, Palo Alto’s vision is not only to be known as the Heart of the Community, but also the “Economic Engine” of the south side.

San Antonio College

San Antonio College was established as University Junior College in September 1925, under the auspices of the University of Texas. In 1948, San Antonio Junior College’s name was changed to San Antonio College, and in 1951, the college was moved to its present location on San Pedro Avenue. Five hundred students were enrolled at that time. The Southern Association of Colleges and Schools granted accreditation to the college in 1955.

In the late 1960s, San Antonio College became a comprehensive community college by expanding offerings in occupational and technical courses and by assuming the San Antonio Independent School District’s continuing education program. The name of the college district was changed to San Antonio Community College District in 1978 and in 1982 the district was renamed the Alamo Community College District.

The college has an average semester enrollment of 21,000 credit students and an average annual enrollment of 16,000 other-than-credit students.

Data Collection

There were two types of data collection used in the study. The first included a transcript analysis that was conducted in April 2006. This analysis included the 30 African-American students who became eligible for the college scholarships during the past school year (2005). A college-level GPA was used to determine the academic performance of the students. Comparative data was also collected on 30 African-American students who were first time in college (FTIC) traditional freshmen who had not participated in the SAEP program.

The second type of data collection used in the study was an online student survey. The survey titled SAEP Student Survey is presented in Appendix A. An effort was made to interview 30 students who participated in the program for the 2005/2006 academic school year. A self-administered online survey was set up for students to access during May 2006. Three weeks after the initial mail-out reminder form which included information on how to access the website, a telephone survey was attempted with non-respondents to increase the overall rate of completion. Additional demographic data for this study was collected from the management information system of the San Antonio Independent School District and from the San Antonio Education Partnership Office.

Instrumentation

The survey questionnaire addressed important issues raised by community activists, educators, high school/college administrations, instructional faculty, counselors, and parents. The questionnaire was reviewed by both high school and college counselors to ensure that it was reader-friendly and relevant to the issues addressed in the research.

The survey was divided into five sections: (1) reasons for committing to the SAEP program, (2) The SAEP experience, (3) outcomes of the experience, (4) how the program can be improved, and (5) background information.

- **Section One** of the survey provided data about the reasons of participation in the SAEP program and the immediate educational objectives.
- **Section Two** provided data on how the SAEP program supported students during their years in high school, as well as any support they received after entering college.
- **Section Third** collected data pertaining to the outcomes from the experience. Were they satisfied with the outcome, and would it have been different had they not been enrolled in the program?
- **Section Four** solicited information about how the SAEP program can be improved, and what support systems they felt were lacking during their years in High School. The fifth section of the survey provided data about the participant's background which included factors having to do with prior academic performance, parental/sibling education, parental occupational status, and long –term educational objectives, and short and long term career objectives.
- **Section Five** solicited information about the participant's backgrounds. This includes demographic information related to ethnicity, income, and other pertinent factors.

This survey included five open-ended questions that provided the participants

with the opportunity to comment on their overall satisfaction with the SAEP program, and to provide feedback on how participating in the SAEP program would benefit students in their future educational pursuits.

Data Analysis

The statistical procedures used in this study were applicable to a descriptive and predictive study, which is useful for making inferences and generalizations about a population on the basis of a sample drawn from it.

Definition of the Area of Research

The objective of this study is to research the strategies of a college-high school partnership in the city of San Antonio. The San Antonio Education Partnership, which is under the auspices of the San Antonio College District targets students attending 15 San Antonio high schools in seven San Antonio school districts. These are: Edgewood ISD -- Kennedy and Memorial High Schools; Harlandale ISD -- Harlandale and McCollum High Schools; North East ISD -- Lee High School; San Antonio ISD -- Burbank, Edison, Fox Tech, Highlands, Houston, Jefferson, and Lanier High Schools; Southside ISD -- Southside High School; South San ISD -- South San High School; Southwest ISD -- Southwest High School. Currently, there are over 25,000 students being targeted for these services. Ninety-three percent of the students are minority, 84% are economically disadvantaged, and 74% are the first in their families to graduate from high school or attend college.

Institutional Sample: Seven San Antonio School Districts/15 High Schools

1. Edgewood ISD (Kennedy and Memorial HS)
2. Harlandale ISD (Harlandale and McCollum HS)
3. North East ISD (Lee HS)
4. San Antonio ISD (Burbank, Edison, Fox Tech, Highlands, Houston, Jefferson, Lanier)
5. South San ISD (South San HS)
6. South West ISD (South West HS)
7. South Side ISD (Southside High)

Population Sample

- Racial and ethnic description: Hispanic and African-American
- Social and class descriptor: Low Income, First generation college students.
- Other descriptors: Highly motivated, B average, 90% attendance

Summary

Chapter III described the methodological considerations and procedures utilized by the researcher in conducting the study. The chapter defined the participants and described the institutional study. Also, the data collection process, instrumentation, research design, and statistical analysis were reported, detailing the selected quantitative and qualitative methodologies.

CHAPTER IV

FINDINGS

Nothing contributes so much to tranquilize
the mind as a steady purpose – a point on
which the soul may fix its intellectual eye.
—Mary Wollstonecraft Shelly

I know of no more encouraging fact than
The unquestionable ability of man to
Elevate his life by a conscious endeavor.
— Henry David Thoreau

Introduction

This chapter will present the research findings, beginning with an overview of the study that was conducted with two sets of program participants who were involved in the San Antonio Education Partnership Program. The first set of participants consisted of 30 Hispanic students who graduated from high schools within the San Antonio Independent School District between 2002 and 2005, and the second set of participants were 12 African-American students who graduated from high schools within the San Antonio Independent School District between 2002 and 2005. The findings describe some of the key factors that influenced program participants to enroll into the SAEP program, as well as illustrate some of the main reasons why they decided to persist in fulfilling the primary academic requirements needed to receive the SAEP college scholarship. The findings will also provide some insights into what the participants found most and least valuable about the program. Lastly, the findings will focus on the institutional and external factors that

the participants described as highly effective in motivating them to persist toward graduation and matriculation into a local college/university.

Patterns and Themes

The patterns and themes that were collected through data analysis are presented in narrative form. In addition, the research data led the researcher to a further review of literature, which is included in the findings. The findings will present themes generated from the responses to the research questions that are delineated in Chapter I, which provided the foundational structure for this study. Consequently, the study results will be organized and presented by using five themes that came directly from the participants own words and experiences:

1. The Incentive (Getting the Scholarship)
2. The SAEP Counselor (High School & College Support)
3. Encouragement & Motivation From Family and Friends
4. Staying On Track & Achieving my Academic Goals (Going To College)
5. Anybody Can Succeed In this Program (Leave the Bar Where It Is)

Overview of the Study

This analysis involved the selection of 42 participants through a random sampling provided by the San Antonio Education Partnership Office. Thirty of the participants were Hispanic students, and 12 students were African-American students. The first step in this process of selecting the participants for the study consisted of the SAEP office sending out 300 letters inviting currently enrolled college students to come to the administrative headquarters to participate in group interviews. The objective was to

interview 60 students (30 Hispanic Students/30 African-American students) in groups of ten students per focus group.

Unfortunately, only two students responded to this invitation. As a result of the low response to the initial invitation, the researcher made arrangements to interview each of the participants by phone. Therefore, the SAEP office compiled two condensed lists—one comprised of Hispanic students and the other comprised of African-American students—from the initial list of students who had been invited for the first interview date. The first list was comprised of 113 Hispanic students, and the second list was comprised of 58 African-American students. All of the students who were selected and included in the two lists met the criteria to be interviewed for the study.

1. The student successfully graduated from a SAEP designated high school between 2003 to 2005.
2. The student maintained a B average or higher.
3. The student had a 90 percent or higher attendance rate during his/her time in high school.
4. The student is currently enrolled in a college/university in the San Antonio area.

Both men and women were interviewed by the researcher, and over 95% of the participants were currently enrolled in the one of three colleges (San Antonio Community College, Palo Alto Community College, St. Philip's Community College) within the Alamo Community College District. Interviews were conducted by phone and 18 questions were asked. From among the Hispanic high school students that were

interviewed, there were 19 girls and 11 boys. As for the African-American high school students, there were eight girls and four boys who participated in the study.

The field research was conducted in the month of June, consisting of detailed notes of the interviews, some of which are included as excerpts or empirical knowledge based on personal experiences, which helped to put the interview data in perspective. Accordingly, conversations with the students were based on a set of open-ended questions (see Appendix A) that corresponded with the research objectives. Most of the questions started with the phrase "Tell Me About…" which prevented most of the participants from giving closed-ended answers. The 18 questions were arranged under five section headings. They included the following:

1. Reasons for Joining the SAEP
2. Institutional Factors That Contributed to Success
3. External Factors that Contributed to Success
4. Improvement and Changes (Desired by the Participant)
5. Resources and Incentives

Prior to each interview, study participants were given the opportunity to read or have read to them an explanation of the purpose of the interview, along with issues of anonymity and confidentiality. For safety reasons, verbal consent was requested rather than written, given that all were undocumented students at the time of our conversation. Due to the researcher not being conversant in Spanish, all of the interviews were carried out in English. The interviews lasted between 30-45 minutes.

Interview Process

The connections made during the initial interviews included the SAEP college coordinator, which was crucial in gaining access and credibility to potential study participants. The college coordinator contacted each participant by letter, taking into consideration their privacy, anonymity, and undocumented status. This helped to build a non-threatening atmosphere, resulting in the researcher's ability to "get along" with the participants with relative ease during research fieldwork. After completing several interviews and becoming familiar with the students' experiences, a similar pattern of recurring themes emerged within Group 1 (Hispanic participants) and Group 2 African American participants). While most of the themes that emerged from both groups were similar, the African American students stressed a desire for more intimacy with their SAEP counselor, while the Hispanic students stressed that their SAEP counselor was always there for them, in terms of providing the information and guidance they needed to graduate and matriculate to college.

The findings in the subsequent chapter will illustrate how the cultural differences of Group 1 (Hispanic students) and Group 2 (African American students), based on family structure, historical experiences, and societal expectations, elicited different reactions and responses concerning how their needs were being met, as well as their general outlook of how the program was run. While the majority of the students from both programs were satisfied with their overall experiences in the SAEP programs, most of the African American students interviewed were highly interested in having more time with their SAEP counselor than the Hispanic students. On the other hand, many of the

Hispanic students seemed to be very happy with the time they were allotted to spend with their counselors, and responded that in most cases, the counselor was "always there for me." Some of the Hispanic students were so impressed with their counselors, that they continued to meet with the same high school SAEP counselor after they entered college.

Most of the respondents were very accommodating, and answered the questions with no reservations. The researcher made every attempt to describe the imminent benefits of the study, and talked about how the SAEP model could be possibly replicated in other cities where school industry leaders have an interest in developing collaborative educational partnerships. This strategy resulted in building a rapport with the research participants, many of whom felt that their ideas were contributing toward the growth of future programs similar to the SAEP partnership. The relative degree of success in collecting rich and reliable data is supported by the fact that the students were willing to talk and provide information about their lives and emotions.

Interviews By Phone

The benefit of doing phone interviews with the two groups of respondents was that they were able to share with me their experiences without being influenced by the answers of other participants. Because many of the people in the program are familiar with the same counselors and other authority figures in the SAEP program, they felt more at ease in discussing what they did not like about the program, as well as the improvements they wanted to see implemented within the high school and college components of the SAEP program.

Socio-Economic Factors Shared by Respondents

Most of the individuals involved in the study were low-income, first-generation college students, and therefore highly valued the scholarship they were offered by the partnership. Although pursuing the "scholarship offer" was the major reason that most of the participants joined the program in the beginning, it was found that over time, other facets of the program became more important to many of the participants than just receiving the scholarship. In other cases, all of the facets of the program were viewed as important, and they could not be ranked in any particular order.

While criticisms of the program were few, the researcher had to assure each participant that their scholarships would not be in jeopardy by voicing any criticism against the program, nor would their name be published in the final document, linking them to any statements that they had made. This was very useful in getting the participants to express their openness about how the program was run, as well as allowed them to pinpoint any inadequacies in the program that they felt needed to be corrected by the SAEP staff. What became evident within the interviewing process is that the participants were much more aware of SAEP's strengths at the high school level than at the college level. This observation was shared by most of the participants from both groups, regardless of the college campus they attended within the Alamo Community College District.

Qualitative Analysis: Coding the Data

As the dialogues with the participants of both groups progressed, the investigation of their experiences revealed that they were uniquely interested in attaining

a higher level of economic security and upward mobility than what their parents had experienced. Because most of the respondents were not in middle-to-high-income families, some of the students who were interviewed in this survey said that one of their greatest fears was not having enough money to go to college. Duran (1983) claims that financial difficulties are the reason most often cited by Hispanics for withdrawing from high school and postsecondary education. In contrast, whites most often withdrew to obtain practical experience.

It goes without saying that most of the students interviewed for this study admittedly joined the SAEP program for the sole purpose of receiving the academic scholarship. Some of the respondents stated unabashedly that had it not been for the SAEP scholarship, they would not have been able to attend college. While others felt that they could have advanced to college without the SAEP program, they admitted that without the SAEP scholarship, it would have been extremely difficult having to cover the costs of their books, transportation, and other miscellaneous costs associated with tuition and fees.

Because this study is focusing on the main institutional and external factors that influenced Hispanic and African American students to achieve academic persistence and matriculate to college, a number of themes emerged that were very similar between both groups of participants in their quest for excellence. Conversely, because of the cultural and historical differences between the two groups, the researcher was able to uncover dissimilar patterns and themes that gave credence to a unique set of beliefs, needs, and aspirations that are clearly tied to race, ethnicity, and social class. Barrera (1979) boldly

identified the twofold goals and cultural perspective of Hispanic peoples, stating that their first goal refers to "…economic, social, and political equality between Chicanos and the mainstream white, or Anglo, population. The second involves the maintenance of a cohesive and culturally distinct communal identity" (Barrera, 1979). It became apparent while sifting through the data, that in some cases, the Hispanic and African-American students had differing opinions about the value of the certain services that were offered to the participants.

The data drawn from the participants' understanding of posed questions as well as from their commitment to examining and communicating events of their realities in this study have revealed potential themes. The data uncovered are not at the discretion of the researcher to conceal, distort, or suppress. Consequently, the findings were drawn together to uncover the multiple realities of two different groups of students served by the SAEP, and to find out how well its programs and services were meeting the needs of each cultural group.

Some of the main questions the researcher pondered as he conducted the survey included: (1) Were the programs and services designed uniformly to meet the needs of all students regardless of ethnicity? (2) Were the services designed to accommodate the needs of clients based on their socio-cultural-economic differences? (3) Were both groups equally happy with the services or was their a subtle (or even blatant) perception that one group benefited more from the programs and services than the other? These particular questions were never posed to the students, but the researcher was interested in

knowing how the SAEP program delivered its services, and to what extent administrators designed their programs to meet the unique needs of all of their students.

Other questions that emerged were (1) Does one group get better served than the other? (2) Does one cultural group reap more benefits due to the fact that it is in the majority (3) Did the African-American group of students accrue any perceived or real benefits for being the minority in the program? Some of the key themes that eventually emerged from the data were accomplished by coding the recurring themes from all of the dialogues that were collected from the 42 interviews in the month of July 2006.

Thematic Responses

The generated themes provide a contextual framework that outlines the character of each participant's life. In turn, each participant's life is presented as a holistic view of their personal journey through the SAEP program, from there initial exposure and involvement in the program from their ninth grade year in high school, to their graduation from High School, and eventual matriculation to college/university of their choice.

The themes reflected the participant's motivation and desire to go college, the strong external support from within their families, and the validation and guidance they received from their special advocate (SAEP counselor). These factors proved to be very consistent among most of the participants in both groups. These themes also indicate that the outcome of success that many of the students experienced can be traced to a variety of strong support sub-systems ranging from the family to the assigned mentors in the school or special program.

Without all of these systems of support at working together, it is obvious that a large number of the respondents would have never had the chance to attend college. Some of the respondents were very adamant about their support networks, and gave examples of people in their families that were directly responsible for getting them to go to college. Through all kinds of family difficulties, personal problems, financial hardship, etc. these themes provide clues about how some of these students persisted, even when under normal conditions, the average student would have dropped out of school.

These data were rich with material, providing significant context from which to weave a tapestry that would provide meaning for the study. By using a four-step process to code the data, the researcher was able to find patterns based on the literature that was reviewed, and the theoretical framework of the study. Glaser and Strauss describe this process of coding as paradigmatic of the "constant comparative method" of grounded theory and qualitative data analysis. It's a four-step process that consists of: 1) comparing units of meaning across categories for inductive category coding; 2) refining categories; 3) "delimiting the theory" by exploring relationships and patterns across categories; and 4) integrating data to write theory (Glaser & Strauss, 1974 pp.105-115).

Overall, the participants' comments were authentic and recorded directly from phone conversations. All of the participants were candid about their experiences within the SAEP, and for the most part, valued the scholarship and the services they received throughout their tenure in the program. As a result, the focus in using grounded theory is to unravel elements of experience and use interrelationships to build theory that enables the researcher to understand the nature and meaning of an experience for a particular

group of people in a particular setting.

Findings from the Interviews

Each participant's categories with related themes are presented as they appear under inter-related context. Some themes emerged for some participants but not others and certainly not in the same order. Therefore, each presentation of the findings conveys a different ordering of dialogue that best represents the individuality of each participant.

The following five themes emerged among the views expressed by the 42 participants in describing the educational experiences that they encountered as students in the SAEP program:

1. The Incentive (Getting the Scholarship)
2. The SAEP counselor (High School and College Support)
3. Encouragement & Motivation From Family and Friends
4. Staying On Track & Achieving my Academic Goals (Going To College)
5. Anybody Can Succeed In this Program

The following section draws correlations between other studies that shed light on the lives and experiences of this study's participants. The conclusions and observations drawn from other research pertaining to this topic serve to explain and further clarify the phenomenon of experiences that cut across the participants' encounters as well as sub-themes following the researcher's perspective of participant's responses. While respecting the uniqueness of each participant's episodes, this final section explores what was learned from the expressed voices of these forty-two young men and women.

THEME # 1: The Incentive (Getting the Scholarship)

Financial Barriers

One of the major barriers facing minority students in their quest to graduate from high school and enter college has been attributed to economic factors that are typically a composite measure of a series of family demographic variables such as family income and parental education. Studies have shown that the general relationship between family socioeconomic status (SES) and dropout behavior appears to be true for both Whites, Hispanics, but not for African Americans (Rumberger, 1991). Another critical factor that indirectly affects the socioeconomic status of a family is family composition. In general, research suggests that students from single parent households are more likely to drop out of school than students from families where both parents are present (Bachman, Green, and Wirtanen, 1971; Velez, 1989).

A U.S. Bureau of Census demographic study of children under 18 years who had dropped out of high school based on race and ethnicity found that 39% of Hispanic dropouts, 45% of African American dropouts, and 15% of white dropouts lived below the poverty level (US Bureau of Census, 1988), In essence, the dropout rates were almost three times higher for students from low SES families than from high SES families.

On the other hand, the same study found that the percentage of dropouts living with both parents was 68.2% for Hispanic students, 75% for white students, and only 43.1% for African American students. As a result of this growing trend in the African American community, African American students, when compared to other ethnic groups in the United States, make up the largest number of students living in single parent

households.

While this factor does not always determine if a African American (or Hispanic) student will be a high school dropout, it does indicate that it can be a powerful predictor for affecting how well as student will do in school, as it relates to measures of student performance such as student grades, test scores, and retention, which in turn are strongly associated with dropping out (Rumberger, 1991).

Lack of Money: The Root of Not Going to College

Vernaz (2001) claims that poverty is a key factor associated with the low educational attainment of children, and that it has a more detrimental effect on Hispanic and African American children. For example, one out of two Hispanic children lives in families in the lowest income quartile, compared with one in four for Asians, and one in five for non-Hispanic whites. Current studies concerning this trend indicate that the economic future of Hispanic families will continue to get worse, and that the number of Hispanic children (aged 0 to 17) in low-income families is projected to increase by about 25 percent in the next decade.

By 2010, about 43 percent of Hispanic children are projected to live in families in the lowest income quartile. These children will account for one-third of all children living in such families (Vernez and Krop, 1999). If this trend continues unabated, it can be surmised that growing numbers of Hispanic students will be deterred from matriculating to college in higher numbers than in the past.

Because many Hispanic and African American students from low-income families have traditionally not been cognizant of how to obtain grants and scholarships

after they graduate from high school, financial uncertainty has come to be a perceived barrier that prevents them from pursing their dreams. Arbona (1990) and Leong (1985) argue that perceived barriers (lack of study skills, ethnicity, family issues, finances, sexism, racism, etc.) to educational and career goals are especially important in understanding the gap between ability and educational/occupational attainment among people of color (Arbona, 1990; Leong, 1985). In the case of most of the SAEP students, the majority of them cited "lack of finances" as their fear of preventing them from going to college.

Other researchers such as Luzzo (1993) have found that Hispanic students were most likely to have experienced financial barriers, and African-American students were most likely to view ethnicity as a barrier in the future (Luzzo, 1993).

However, in the case of the African-American students who were interviewed in the study, none of them cited race as a possible barrier to them entering college. This is perhaps because most of them were making plans to attend community colleges in the San Antonio area, where race was not a factor in preventing them from being accepted into college. On the contrary, the African-American participants, both female and male, seemed just as concerned about overcoming their financial barriers as their Hispanic counterparts. While both groups shared a similar concern about overcoming their financial insecurities, the female Hispanic students were more vocal about this fear than their male counterparts. This is possibly due to the fact that Hispanic women was not given as much validation and support to attend college as Hispanic males.

McWhirter (1982) pointed out that gender role socialization is often noted as a barrier with respect to the educational and career attainment of Mexican-American women. Furthermore, Vasquez (1982) also viewed gender role socialization as a barrier among Mexican-American women's participation in Higher Education and found that a lack of financial support and the internalization of society's negative messages toward minorities (or triple minorities) as women, persons of color, and often as members of a lower socioeconomic class (Vasquez, 1982).

The Latina/o population is reported to encounter obstacles that challenge their persistence toward a postsecondary education. Swail, Cabrera, and Lee (2004) explain these influential barriers include limitation in the English language, parent's educational attainment level and lack of postsecondary experience, siblings who dropped out of school, and low-income.

As the results of the study unfolded, it became evident that most of the participants involved in the SAEP program viewed financial uncertainty as one of their most formidable barriers. While various studies have found that a larger percentage of Hispanic students tend to perceive the lack of finances as a barrier to reaching their educational objectives than African-American students, the results of this study indicated that both groups of participants perceived the lack of finances as the biggest threat to their future success.

Socioeconomic Class and College Cost: Who Will Take the Weight?

As the costs for college continue to skyrocket out of control in the 21st century, one of the questions that has been raised by educators and social theorists is to what

extent does this have a negative impact on academic persistence and college choice? Studies have shown that during the 1980s and 1990s, the federal government made a dramatic shift from using grants as the primary means of promoting postsecondary opportunity to using loans for this purpose. As a result, there has been a decrease in state support for public colleges and universities, and an increase in tuition to make up for the shortfall. In the end, the burden of paying for college has been shifted from the general public to students and their families (Breneman & Fenney, 1997).

This recent high-staked cost explosion can be characterized as a period of high tuition, high aid, but with an emphasis on loans rather than grants. (Paulson & St. John, 2002) The problem with this new radical makeover in financial aid is that a large number of low-income students feel that debt itself impedes their future plans, while others who fear the consequences of debt may not seriously consider the benefits of higher education, relegating themselves to lower-paying jobs and fewer opportunities (Burdman, 2005).

The Racial Wealth Gap

Because of the disparity in wealth differences between whites and minorities in the United States, Hispanics and African-Americans continue to trail behind most Americans in wealth accumulation and financial viability, and therefore are less likely to provide the means for their children to gain access to higher education.

This economic disparity was highlighted in a study undertaken by the Consumer Federation of America (CFA) which showed that based on data from the Federal Reserve Board's 1998 Survey of Consumer Finances, that the typical African American household in the United States had a net worth of $15,500 (total assets minus total debt),

while net worth of typical American families is $71,700. In comparison to these differences, the typical African American household had a net worth that was only 21.6 percent of all American households (Consumer Federation of America, 1998). A 1998 survey conducted by the Federal Reserve on non-white Households revealed that median net worth for Hispanics, African-Americans, Asians, and other minorities was $ 16,400, which amounted to 17.28 percent of the net worth of white families. Dreazen's (2000) research concerning the racial wealth gap revealed the following:

- The median net worth of non-Hispanic white families was $ 94,000.
- The median income for non-white and Hispanic families was $ 23,000 in 1998 – 61.8 percent that of non-Hispanic whites.
- Non-Hispanic whites registered a median income of $ 37,700.
- Minorities own homes at a much lower rate than whites and are far less likely to invest some of their earnings in stocks—which propelled assets of many white families upward in the 1990's.
- Whites inherit more money that minorities and have a much larger asset base to devote to investments.
- More African American are single than Whites, so household net worth, and income are likely to be lower, even if the individual members are equally well off.

Based on future economic forecasts, the U.S. Government has predicted that the enormous wealth gap between white families and African American and Hispanic families will continue to grow larger. With little financial support from their families, Hispanic and African-American students will continue to enroll in college at a much slower rate than their white peers.

The Positive Impact of Financial Aid

A study compiled by The Institute for Higher Education Policy (2001) on student success practices for New England low-income and minority students found that financial aid continues to be vital to the success of low-income students. The students in this study felt that pre-college programs such as the Federal TRIO programs had a positive impact on their lives, and two-thirds felt the programs were very helpful. As for receiving financial aid in college, 90% of those interviewed in the study received assistance in paying for college. Many of them also felt that knowing they could expect to receive financial aid in the future was very important to them in their decision-making process to stay in college.

Most of the responses from the participants in the SAEP study confirmed these findings, and more than 95% confirmed that without the scholarship, their chance of being able to pay for college would have been severely limited. However, by getting the opportunity to participate in the SAEP program with the promise of receiving a scholarship to attend college, most of the students felt motivated to live up to the academic objectives outlined in the annual SAEP contract.

Exploring the Scholarship Incentive

This section will provide clarity and categorize the information into sub-themes. The participant's voices, along with the literature, will be used to illustrate what is relevant to the sub-themes.

Background Information about the SAEP Scholarship

The SAEP scholarship is guaranteed to all partnership students who successfully graduate from one of the 18 SAEP affiliated high schools in the city of San Antonio. This scholarship award does not cover all of a student's fees, and is only a partial scholarship provided to students who have successfully achieved an 80% grade average in grades 10-12, as well as maintained a 90% attendance in grades 9-12. SAEP scholarships vary in amount, depending on the type of college or university a participant enrolls into. Participants are awarded $ 350 a year if they enroll into a two year community college; $ 500 if they enroll into a public university; and $ 1000 if they enroll into a private university. The scholarship is only awarded to SAEP students who attend colleges or university in the city of San Antonio.

Feelings About the Scholarship

In the individual sessions, various participants explained why they joined the SAEP program, citing that it was the SAEP scholarship that got them to take the commitment seriously, and to strive to maintain the B average and 80% attendance rate. Participant # 2 explained that "The scholarship helped me financially, and my parents too, because it allowed them to support me more, like buying books and stuff" (personal communication, July 10, 2006). The lack of money was a frequent concern voiced by many of the respondents. In this respect, Participant # 10 emphasized the impact of the scholarship on his life and the fear he had of not being able to afford a college education, stating that, "It helped me to pay for school. But it also gave me a little push and made me want to keep trying. Because with most people, the first thing on their mind is money.

The money! This is the biggest setback for high school students. It is a big fear for 80% of the students out there" (personal communication, July 12, 2006). Participant #11 talked about how the scholarship served as an incentive for him to stay in the program, stating that there was a scholarship available. "It was one of the only scholarships that I had received at the time. I tried to meet the requirements for it. The counselors were very helpful and guided me through the process. I think it was an incentive for me to go to college. So, I kept going because I wanted the scholarship. It wasn't that hard to do it" (personal communication, July 12, 2006).

Although the award was less than $300 per year for most students, some of the respondents talked about how essential it was for helping them to get through college. Student # 19 explained her need for the scholarship to get through college, stating:

> "I knew it wasn't going to be easy to pay for college out of my pocket. After graduation, I felt that it really helped me out when it came to college because I needed all the help that I could get. Getting the award helped me so much, and it made me realize that there are so many people out there who really wanted me to complete my education" (personal communication, July 13, 2006).

My Parents Made Too Much Money

In some instances, students talked about how their parents made too much money for them to qualify for financial aid, and how beneficial it was to receive the SAEP scholarship at their time of enrollment in college. Student # 30 said that on a scale of 1 to 10, the impact was a 10. She claimed that "Because my father makes too much money, I didn't qualify for financial aid, and I really needed the money bad. I am very happy with the scholarship, and it was a good amount (personal communication, July 13, 2000).

Another student, student # 36, voiced the same concern about her parents making

too much money, stating that “Because my parents make a lot of money, I wasn’t able to get financial aid. So, the Partnership allowed for me to get a scholarship, despite not being able to get other financial support and aid.” Student # 8 talked about how the promise of the scholarship motivated her to stay in school. She stated that “It wasn’t hard to stick with the program. It made a difference knowing that the money would be coming in. For me, the scholarship was great because I had never received one. It was something that I could show for my hard work after four years of High School”. (personal communication, July 13, 2006).

An Extra Incentive

Other students, who were determined to go to college, looked at the SAEP scholarship as an extra incentive to help them get through college. Student # 18 explained: “I had planned to go to college, to a local college, so the money could help me. It was already a goal for me and helped me financially, even with the other financial aid (personal communication, July 13, 2006). Based on the economic hardships experienced by both the Hispanic and African American student participants, both groups expressed a widespread enthusiasm and respect for the SAEP scholarship. Student # 41 epitomized this attitude by proudly saying, “It has been helping a lot because I am paying for school all by myself”. (personal communication, July 14, 2006).

Anything Is Good, But More Is Better

Through the course of the interviews, while none of the participants made negative comments about the SAEP scholarship award, several voiced their dissatisfaction with the specific amounts they received and felt that they should have

received more. Because over 90% of participants interviewed attend community colleges in the Alamo Community College District, the average award received by students from both groups is roughly $ 175 per semester.

Some students felt that the scholarship amount needed be to slightly increased. When they were asked by how much, some participants felt the amount they were receiving should be doubled. For example, Student # 4 said, “The scholarship is not enough, however, I think $ 300 a semester would be sufficient” (personal communication, July 10, 2006). Student # 8 stated that the amount should be raised on a case-by-case basis, depending on the course load and the particular school someone is enrolled in. When he was asked was the scholarship award sufficient to meet his needs, he adamantly replied, “No, it (the scholarship) is not enough! But you can’t depend on one scholarship. If I was on the Board of the Partnership, I would increase the scholarship depending on the major and the school someone is attending” (personal communication, July 13, 2006).

Another student (Student # 12) who is planning on being a doctor expressed this frustration about the award amount, saying that, “I am majoring in biology and hope to be a doctor one day. It goes without saying that the major I am in costs more money. It would help if they (SAEP administrators) would give more money to people majoring in the scientific fields like mine”(personal communication, July 11, 2006). Along the same lines, Student # 24 stated that, “I think it could be increased based on how many classes you are taking”(personal communication, June 12, 2006).

Throughout the interviews, both groups were asked to express their opinion on

whether they felt that the scholarship was sufficient to meet their own personal needs, or if the amount needed to be raised. Based on 30 Hispanic students who were asked this question:

A.) 16 (53%)respondents replied that they were satisfied with the award

B.) 11 (36%) respondents replied that the reward should be increased

C.) 3 (10%) respondents were unsure.

When the African –American students were asked the same question, the following results came out of the survey:

A.) 8 (66%) respondents replied that they were satisfied with the award.

B.) 3 (25%) respondents replied that the award should be increased.

C.) 1 (9%) respondent was uncertain.

Satisfaction Survey of the Financial Award: Is It Enough or Should It be raised?

Total Students = 42	**Hispanic Students – 30**	**African American Students - 12**
I am happy with it!	53% (16)	66% (8)
It should be increased!	36% (11)	25% (3)
Uncertain	10% (3)	9% (1)

What the results from data tell the researcher is that over 50% of the participants from both groups were happy with the scholarship award, and felt that the amount was sufficient to meet their academic needs. Although the Hispanic group was larger, the African-American group had a higher percentage of participants who replied that they were satisfied with the annual amount of the award, when compared to the responses from the Hispanic students. What was interesting about the respondents who desired a

higher award amount, is that the amount they desired was only $ 175 to $ 300 more than what they were currently receiving.

While most of the respondents did not express a specific dollar amount concerning the increase, a few of them expressed a desire for their scholarship award to be doubled from $ 175 per semester to approximately $ 300 a semester. Only two students felt that the scholarship award should exceed $ 1000 a year, under the condition that the student is attending a private or public university.

For the most part, the majority of the participants expressed enthusiasm about receiving the scholarship, and said that it was a big help to them financially. Others stated that it influenced them to stay focused on their goals to graduate from High School and proceed to college. Student # 42 expressed her enthusiasm for the scholarship, stating that, "The scholarship was the thing that kept me going" (Personal communication, July 14, 2006). Although a few of the beneficiaries claimed that the reward did not make a difference in how well they did in the classroom (or that they would have excelled without it), they too appreciated receiving it upon graduation.

Differences and/or Similarities between Hispanic and African-American Students

There were very few differences in how Hispanic students and African-American students perceived the scholarship award. The majority of the respondents from both groups were very happy to receive the award, and most of the respondents claimed that the award was the primary reason for them joining the program, and committing themselves to successful completion of high school. The only difference, based on the survey, is that 66% of the African-American students interviewed (12 students) appeared

to be content with the monetary amount of the award, as opposed to only 53% of the Hispanic Students. Had the African-American student sample been larger, it is possible that the results might have been similar to the Hispanic percentage. Nonetheless, based on all of the responses from both groups of respondents, the overall perception and feeling about the award was positive and appreciative.

THEME # 2: The High School SAEP Counselor

Another major theme that was prevalent throughout most of the interviews was the student's personal involvement with the High School SAEP counselor who was specifically assigned to their high school. A number of studies have typified guidance counselors as "critical gatekeepers" in student's progress through the educational pipeline (Lee & Ekstrom, 1987). For many of the respondents, it became clear that the SAEP counselor's role at the high school level was indispensable toward them successfully graduating and entering college. High school counselors are also reported to be influential in the college choice process. Fallon (1997) discusses that they can be influential in helping the minority, economically disadvantaged, and first generation students through the preparation of pursuing a college degree. They provide the guidance to assist students develop a college mind-set, consider postsecondary options, and prepare for higher education. Fallon emphasizes that "Counselors can introduce them (students) to postsecondary educational opportunities and related topics. Such topics as the importance of high school course selections, college testing, financial aid, decision making, and values clarification can help students become aware of their options" (p. 31). Fallon also stresses that counselors are "vitally important in ensuring that these students

and their parents receive adequate information that will address their needs" (p. 37).

In reviewing all of the key factors that students described as being a big help toward their success in the program, most of the students - of both groups - said that the counselor's role was an important (internal) organizational factor that influenced many of them to take an interest in joining the SAEP program. In addition to the general high school counselor that was available in the High School Counseling office, the SAEP counselor's role was strategically aligned toward:

- Recruiting new students into the SAEP program.
- Keeping track of each student's academic progress and attendance rates.
- Helping students to apply for financial aid and scholarships.
- Facilitating academic workshops, college tours, SAEP functions

Informed, Encouraged, and Empowered

Many of the students who were asked about their involvement with the SAEP counselor expressed that they felt informed, encouraged, and empowered, based on the support they received from their counselor. The relationship with the SAEP counselor usually spanned over a 3 to 4 year period, starting for most students in the 9th grade and ending in the 12th grade. During the course of the interviews, some of the students mentioned that they were so fond of their SAEP counselor, that even when they were reprimanded for poor attendance or bad grades, they appreciated feedback. Student # 4's response was typical of what many students said about the SAEP counselor. She stated that, "The Counselor really encouraged me to get in the program and take advantage of other scholarships"(personal communication, July 10, 2006).

In addition to keeping students informed, encouraged, and empowered, students said they felt motivated by their involvement with the Counselors. Student # 8 said, "Since my freshman year in high school, they have been trying to motivate us to stay in college. When I joined the Partnership, I could feel part of myself staying and graduating, and continuing my life in school (personal communication, July 10, 2006). Other students were quick to compare the quality of their relationship with their SAEP counselor to the regular school counselor. Student # 12 remembers that "The Partnership counselor was more helpful than the school counselor. The counselor for the school, I would go see for classes that I needed for High School. But for the Partnership counselor, I would go and see him for other things having to do with college" (personal communication, July,11, 2006). Student # 16 voiced the same observation, stating that "The partnership counselor was very informative, especially when it came to scholarships. Actually, the Partnership counselor was more informative than the regular high school counselors. The Partnership counselor came to see me more, but the other counselors didn't. We had to go see the other counselors to get the information we wanted" (personal communication, July 11, 2006).

Another student (Student # 29) echoed this same compliment, stating that, "She (The Partnership Counselor) was great! She not only helped us out but she told us about the other scholarships that were available. She also recommended looking for other ways to pay for tuition" (personal communication, July 12, 2006).

Not Enough Time With the High School Counselors

While most of the students – both Hispanic and African-American - described the High School Partnership Counselors with accolades like nice, helpful, "always there," good, and great, the responses from several participants about what should improved in the program indicated that the Hispanic students seemed more content with the SAEP counselor's services than their African-American counterparts. When the African-American students were asked what they thought should be improved in program, many of the responses were about the need to increase the amount of time they spent with the counselor. When Student # 32 was asked what could be improved, she said without any hesitation, "The SAEP high school counselor should have more contact with the students. I think it needs to be done at the high school level and the college level. I would say once a month. I want it to be one-on-one"(personal communication, July 13, 2006). Another African-American student (Student # 33), made the same request, stating that,

"The SAEP counselor needs to have more hands on activities with the people. Like taking more time to be with the students. I wouldn't mind if they would just get into my life and structure more time" (personal communication, July 13, 2006). Student # 34 reiterated the same theme almost verbatim, saying that, "The counselors should try to get the students involved and help them hang in there. There needs to be more follow-up, so that there are meetings on a weekly or bi-weekly basis" (personal communication, July 13, 2006).

In discussing the dilemma about not having enough time with her SAEP counselor, one of the African-American students discussed her own ideas about how to

solve the problem. Student # 35 suggested that "They need to have more than one counselor to help out, besides the one that we had. If it were me, I would have the community get more involved, and also get the student body more involved" (personal communication, July 13, 2006). Along the same lines of thought, another African-American student

(Student # 36) stated that "The counselor did not have enough activities and workshops. If it were me, I would hold more activities, and I would let the students know how to do SAT's, essays, how to transfer, and things like that" (personal communication, July 13, 2006).

Another African-American student, who happened to be very satisfied with the program, also felt that the Partnership program could be improved if there were more counseling services available to more students. He implied, from his remarks, that more students in his cohort would have remained involved in the program had there been more contact with the SAEP counselor. Student # 40 accurately summed up the challenge when he stated that "One of the challenges that the Partnership faces is getting the other students involved in the program. I think there needs to be more counseling, more advertising, and the Counselor should do more to go into the classroom to meet the students" (personal communication, July 14, 2006).

Two Views of the College SAEP Counselor

At three of the community colleges (San Antonio College, St. Philip's College, and Palo Alto College) within the Alamo Community College District, funding has been provided by the Partnership Office to staff a college counselor to help SAEP students in

their transition from high school into college. Because the majority of the high school graduates from the SAEP partnership program attend local community colleges before they move on to a four-year institution, the SAEP counselors are strategically placed to serve the needs of the most students. In this capacity, the college counselor is expected to:

- Be vigilant about monitoring the progress of each student.
- Work with the other counselors and staff to reinforce retention efforts to prevent students from dropping out of the program.
- Provide timely information and assistance with financial aid and scholarships.
- Assist the student to make the transition into a four year college or university.

While a few of the students claimed that they had received these services from their college counselor upon entering their respective colleges, the majority of respondents revealed that they had not had the opportunity to meet their SAEP counselor. Nonetheless, several students had positive things to say about their relationship with the SAEP college counselor. Student # 36 said that, "She (SAEP counselor) has been very supportive. She will see us walking around campus and she will stop us and talk with us" (personal communication, July 14, 2006). Similar remarks were made by Student # 22, who said, "They were real cool! Once I got to college, I really didn't see them as much, but they still informed me about all of the things that were happening concerning the scholarship and how to receive money (personal communication, July 12, 2006). Student # 19 said that the emotional support and encouragement she received from her SAEP college counselor was the same as what she had received from her high school counselor.

She stated that, “They supported me the same as the counselor at the high school level. This past year, I had a death in my family, and they encouraged me to keep going. The told me that “We know they are gone and all, but you should keep on going and do it for them” (personal communication, July 11, 2006). Another student (Student # 17) described the SAEP counselor as more involved than his high school counselor. He said that, “The SAC counselor is more persistent. They come after you more than the high school partnership counselor” (personal communication, July 11, 2006).

In Search of the real SAEP College Counselor

While several participants from both groups of students had a few outstanding things to say about role of the SAEP college counselor, the majority of participants said that they had very little contact with the counselor, or did not know he/she existed. In the case of Student # 1, she said that, “The service was not good. They didn’t meet me that much. It was not like in high school. In college, you don’t have to meet with the college advisor” (personal communication, July 10, 2006). Student # 8 expressed confusion about trying to meet the college counselor, and lamented that “I don’t know what counselor I am supposed to be with. I had a teacher who happens to be a counselor, and I trust her a lot. So I had her help me with the classes. I only was able to see the SAEP counselor once” (personal communication, July 10, 2006).

Other students, like Student # 9 made the same observation about her lack of contact with the SAEP college counselor, and admitted that she still meets with her high school SAEP counselor. She said that “I don’t really have one counselor on my college campus that I meet with. I talk to whoever is available. In terms of getting the award, I

still go and meet with my high school counselor. In reality, I have had no contact with my college SAEP counselor" (personal communication, July 10, 2006). Another female student (Student # 12) made similar remarks about having no contact with her college advisor, stating that, "I haven't gone to see my college counselor. I have not met him yet. I still see the SAEP counselor from my high school days. I just go see him and he answers all of my questions. He explains everything" (personal communication, 11, 2006).

Do We Really Have a Counselor On Campus?

When some of the students were asked had they met the SAEP College counselor, a common response from the participants was that they could not remember if they met him/her before. In the example of Student # 18, he said, "I don't think I have met him. I remember visiting a counselor as San Antonio College, but maybe he was not associated with the Partnership" (personal communication, July 11, 2006). Student # 24 said that "I never went to go see him. I never really had a question. My sister had gone through college, so I would ask her to help me"(personal communication, July 12, 2006). In other cases, students were shocked to realize that there was an SAEP college counselor on campus to accommodate their needs. Student # 25 expressed surprise when asked this question, stating that "I haven't even had the chance to meet with him, and didn't know that we had a counselor on campus" (personal communication, July 12, 2006).

Student # 26 had the same reaction when she was asked to comment about her college counselor. She too, expressed surprise at not knowing about the college counselor, saying, "I haven't gone to the counselors yet. I have never heard of the

Partnership counselor"(personal communication, July 12, 2006). Student # 29 also was clueless about the SAEP college counselor, stating that "I haven't spoken to any of them. I did not know that there was one on my campus" (personal communication, July 12, 2006).

Differences and/or Similarities between Hispanic and African-American Students

High School SAEP Counselor: The main similarities shared between both groups concerning the high school SAEP counselor was that the majority of the respondents agreed that the counselors were dedicated and helpful, as well as very supportive of their efforts to graduate and successfully enter college. However, the main difference between the two groups was that many of the African-American students expressed a greater need to meet with the SAEP counselor on a regular basis than their Hispanic counterparts. When they were asked did they want to meet more with the SAEP counselor in groups, the general response from African-American students was that they wanted to meet with the counselor either weekly or bi-weekly on a one-on-one basis. Student # 31's comment spoke for many of the African-Americans, when he remarked that (at the High School level), "There was not enough time with the counselors" (personal communication, July 13, 2006).

While many of the Hispanic students responded that they were satisfied with their meetings and time spent with their counselors, a large number of the African-American students felt like they needed more one-on-one time to handle their academic issues and concerns. Another interesting finding from the study revealed that a number of

the Hispanic students still continued to meet with their SAEP high school counselor for help, even though they had an SAEP college counselor on campus assigned to help them with the same issues.

Conversely, the responses from the African-Americans clearly indicated that they did not continue to see their high school counselors after they graduated from high school. When both groups responded to the query concerning whether or not they were satisfied with their High School counselor (in terms of the time they were allotted, overall quality of the services, etc.), 74% (23 students) of the Hispanic students said that they were happy with the services, while only 50% of the African-American students said that were happy with the services. On the other hand, only 26% (7 students) of the Hispanic students responded that they were either unsure/not happy with the services, while 50% (6 students) of the African American students responded that they were unsure/ not happy with the services.

The College SAEP Counselor: When the same question was posed to both groups about the their relationship with their SAEP college counselor, give and take a few positive statements, the majority of the respondents did not seem to have much contact with the college counselors, or even realize that they were available on campus. In the case of all of the African-American students, except one student, there was no contact with the SAEP College counselor on their campuses. As for the Hispanic students, many responded that they were not aware that the college counselor was available to them. The survey revealed that 74% (23 students) of the Hispanic students were not in contact with or not satisfied with the services offered by their college

counselor, and that 92% of the African-Americans had the same experience. What the results of this study indicated is that once students graduate from high school, there is limited contact between them and the SAEP college counselors assigned to accommodate their needs at the three community colleges.

Satisfaction Survey: Were you happy with the services provided by your H.S. Counselor?

	Hispanic Students	**African-American Students**
Happy/ Content	77% (23)	50% (6)
Unhappy / Not content	23% (7)	50% (6)

Satisfaction Survey: Were you happy with the services provided by your College Counselor?

Total: 42 Students	**Hispanic Students**	**African-American Students**
Happy/ Content	23% (7)	9 % (1)
Unhappy / Not content	77% (23)	92% (11)

THEME # 3: Encouragement & Motivation From Family and Friends

Among the three factors (Scholarship award, Counselor, & Family Support) that students commonly referred to as indispensable part of their success, family support was overwhelmingly the most critical factor that was commonly cited by both the Hispanic

and the African-American students. Recently, ethnographers have taken a strong interest in investigating why certain children from at-risk / low socioeconomic backgrounds, are able to do well in school, and break the intergenerational chains of poverty. Clark (1983) states that "Success in school among poor children of all family types is related to deliberate efforts on the part of parents to inculcate discipline and good study habits in their children."

Astone & McLanahan (1991) gives credence to this conclusion, adding that "School failure is partly the result of inadequate or ineffective parenting styles. "They assert that helpful participation in a child's school career – which inevitably leads to long term educational attainment - can only be realized if the parents not only hold high aspirations for their children," but that they transmit their aspirations to their children." They conclude that if children do not feel close to their parents, or if the parents are not able to supervise their children, parental influence may be seriously undermined. (Astone & McLanahan, 1991)

Lack of success in school and high attrition rates of students at both the high school and college level occur more frequently when students receive less encouragement from their families to take advantage of beneficial schooling opportunities within a particular school, receive less educational instruction at home, or receive less encouragement to remain in high school (or college) when academic or social difficulties arise" (Stinebrickner & Stinebrickner, 2003). In the case of most of the SAEP participants, both the Hispanic and African-American students stated that their parents gave them unwavering support during their participation in the SAEP program. While the

majority of the students said that both of their parents gave them equal support toward achieving their educational goals, other students gave sole credit to one person such as their mother, father, grandparent, sibling, and in some cases, their best friend.

In the case of some students, their siblings were very encouraging. For example, Student # 2 claimed that both her sister and her sister-in-law, who had previously been in the SAEP program, were the most supportive to her. "My family was very supportive. They encouraged me to study a lot and to maintain good grades. However, my sister was perhaps the most supportive. Also, my sister-in-law. She also went through the partnership program, and was able to mentor me through the process in a very helpful way" (Personal Communication, July 10, 2006).

Reflections From My Parents

Some of the students recalled how their parents used their own experiences, to show them what not to do in pursuing their educational dreams. Student # 3 explained that his parents support came in the form of "…basically observing and listening to my parents. They both went to high school, but they had to drop out to support their families. They told me not to do anything stupid like get a girl pregnant, because that would put an end to my future. I would say that I was strongly influenced by both my dad and my mom. I kind of see the stuff that I have that they didn't have, and I'm the kind of person that does not like to complain about things because there are others who have it a lot worse" (personal communication, July 10, 2006). Student # 14 also shared how some of her family members who became "drop outs" motivated her to stay in school. She stated that "My mom and dad were helpful to me, but so were my uncles. None of them went to

college or anything and they were all had jobs in construction. They motivated me not to give up. When they used to visit my family, they used to talk about the good jobs I could get if I finished high school and went to college" (personal communication, July 11, 2006). Similarly, Student # 29 explained that her mother, who was an immigrant from Mexico, emphasized how hard life would be without a diploma. She said that, "My mother would tell me to go and not give up because it is hard in life, and you don't want to end up flipping burgers in life. Also, she didn't have the opportunity that I have because she grew up in Mexico, where at that time, school only went up to the 6th grade. I have an older brother who graduated in 1998, so I am the second in my family to graduate" (personal communication, July 12, 2006).

Single Parent Households

In families where there was only one parent involved in supporting the student's educational journey, some respondents expressed a high level of admiration and honor for that parent. Student # 13 said of her father, "My dad encouraged me to go to college, and he was very happy when he found out I graduated, mainly because my half-brothers did not graduate from high school. After my graduation ceremony, I gave him my diploma. It was a token of my appreciation to show how much I valued his support" (personal communication, July 11, 2006). Similarly, student #40 confided that he would not have been able to get through high school or college without his mother's support. He took on a religious tone when he began to speak of his mother, stating that, "I had this one good person that stood beside me, through good times and rough times. It's my mother! I could just talk to her about anything. If it would not have been for my mother's

support, I wouldn't be where I am today. And when I was in elementary school, she did a lot of stuff. She went to the PTA meetings and all that stuff" (personal communication, July 13, 2006).

In some of the interviews, the respondents talked about how even in the face of dire adversity, someone in their family was there to give them the support they needed to reach their educational goals. Student # 39 shared that, "Between my freshman and sophomore years, it was just my dad and my grandmother helping me to get through school. But then my father passed away, and it was just my grandmother. Unfortunately, my grandmother was not really able to help me because she was born in 1927, so she did not know all of the ends and outs of helping me apply to college. So I had to rely on people at the school to help me get through the process" (personal communication, July 13, 2006).

Differences and/or Similarities between Hispanic and African-American Students

In comparing the differences in the level of support that respondents from both groups received from their families, there were no major differences between the two groups. Among the 30 Hispanic students who were asked did they receive family support during their involvement in the SAEP program, 28 responded that they received support, and 2 responded that they received little or no support. As for the 12 African-American students, 10 claimed that they received support from their families, while two stated that they received little or no support from their families.

Family Support Survey: Were you given ample support and encouragement by your immediate family?

Total Students: 42	**Hispanic Students**	**African-Amer. Students**
Yes	94% (28)	84% (10)
No	6% (2)	16 % (2)

THEME # 4: Staying On Track Through Academic Persistence

Throughout the interviews, a recurring theme that was evoked in much of the dialogue with the participants was the idea of them of graduating from high school and achieving their dream of going to college. In Tinto's Student Departure Theory, he states that academic integration (the student's academic performance) and societal integration (participation in college life) are the keys to persistence of college students. Without the academic or social subsystems of their institutions, most students are more likely to leave (Tinto, 1988). For students of color, the integration into the institution's environment, as well as academic success, can be very difficult, especially at majority White institutions (Myers, 2003).

Tierney (1999) claims that institutions of higher learning need to adopt a model of "cultural integrity" as an intervention for minority students at risk of departing. These students would be identified as Hispanic, low-income, African American, and urban youth. This method of "cultural integrity" develops ways of affirming, honoring, and incorporating the individual's identity into the organization's culture (Tierney, 1999).

Similarly, Rendón's (1993) study found that minority and nontraditional students could be academically successful without total disconnection from their culture, through "validation". His study found that when institutions validated a person's experiences in and out of the classroom, from the time the student arrived on the campus, his/her rate of retention far surpassed other students from similar backgrounds that did not receive any validation. The symbolic communication of the validation process includes the idea that the student has the capacity and competence to complete college successfully. The study summarized the following about the validation process:

- It is an empowering, confirming, and supportive process
- It is a developmental process, not an end
- It is most effective when offered early in the student's college experience
- After the student arrives on campus validation can occur both in and out of class

Other studies have shown that the support of family, schools, and peers is very important to Latinas in completing high school and taking nontraditional careers paths (Henandez, Vargas-Lew, & Martinez, 1994.). For example, school programs that promote self-efficacy, self-confidence, and high expectations are as important as programs that provide opportunities for academic success and career success. Also, events on high school and college campuses that feature successful Latina women in non-traditional fields inspire Latinas to think about new career options (Romo, 1998).

For some of the more self-directed participants who were involved in the program, there was never a doubt in their minds that they wouldn't go to college. But for

others, it was much more of a struggle to envision themselves going to college based on their economic circumstances, or their perceived lack of emotional support from their families. Student # 9 spoke about how the program kept him on track, stating that, "The program set a goal for me to make good grades the whole four years I was there. Everybody kept thinking about that. It helped a lot of people out. They knew if they did not keep up the good grades, they would not get the scholarship." (personal communication, July 10, 2006)

Achieving my Academic Goals (Going To College)

Other students talked about how the program motivated them to get good grades as precursor for going to college. Student # 18 said that, "Being in the program motivated me to make good grades in High School, and the support was also there for me when I got to college. It was nice to know between High School and college, when you are thinking about how you are going to finance your college education, that the money is there waiting on you" (personal communication, July 11, 2006). Student # 22 credited the program with preventing him from dropping out of high school, stating that, "The SAEP program encouraged me to keep going to high school. Because of my involvement in it, I had more of a reason to show up to school and attend classes. (personal communication, July 12, 2006)

Reaching My Dreams

In addition to good grades, students also referred a host of auxiliary services that helped them in their quest to enter college. Student # 36 said that, "The Partnership helped me to develop a back up plan. It also helped me to see that there are opportunities

in San Antonio, and that the economy of San Antonio is growing. Also, through the Partnership, I was able to secure my first internship during the summer. That all came about from my work on one of the SAEP student committees" (personal communication, July 13, 2006). Another student also gave the SAEP program high marks for enabling him to advance from out of his position as a special education student, into the college program of his choice. Student # 40 was not embarrassed to say that, "When I was in High School, I was in a special education program. But I was able to advance to where I am today because of the Partnership program. My progress made possible because I had a lot of good teachers and counselors that stood beside me every step of the way" (personal communication, July 13, 2006).

Differences and/or Similarities between Hispanic and African-American Students

The responses from both groups about "staying on track" and getting into college was quite similar, and indicated that most of the students perceived the Partnership as a powerful channel in helping them to achieve their goals.

THEME # 5: Anybody Can Succeed In this Program

One of the most interesting findings that came out of the interviews with the students, was that many of them felt that the criteria for receiving the scholarship was easy, and that anybody could qualify for it. When they were asked how they felt about the program criteria being so easy, many students described the benefits of the "easy commitment" as a guarantee for them to receive a scholarship, and to provide them with an unique opportunity get into college without doing it all on their own.

When students were asked should the academic bar be raised, the overwhelming

response was that the program should left as it is. In some cases, the students felt that the academic bar should be lowered to give other students a chance to take advantage of the SAEP's scholarship opportunities. In discussing the merits of the program, Student # 11 stated that, "Anybody can actually be a part of the program, and anyone who needs help to get into college. Anybody can apply for it and be in the program" (personal communication, July 11, 2006). Despite the program being easy to get through for some students, Student # 17 described his involvement as a win-win situation. He stated that,

"I was going to do well anyway without being in the program, so the scholarship was like a bonus because I was going to make good grades anyway" (personal communication, July 11, 2006).

While some of the students in the SAEP program felt that the "easy commitment" helped them to make the transition into college, and increased their chances of being gainfully employed in the near future, there are questions about how well prepared they are when they do enroll in college. Tierney & Jin (2001) claim that "A public clamor continues to be heard that the schools need to turn out students who are better prepared for college-level work. The assumption is that if the schools improve, then those who graduate from them will not need affirmative action or remedial education. Although such an assumption is debatable, such a generic long-term solution falls short with regard to what should be done immediately to help those students who desire access to postsecondary education." Will the SAEP program run the risk jeopardizing their graduate's academic careers if they don't raise the standards of academic preparedness at the high school level? Another intriguing question is, can the SAEP program woo more

students into the program by slightly lowering the academic standard to a GPA of a "C" average , without losing support from its corporate sponsors?

In an effort to help more low-income high school students to gain access to postsecondary education, a number of college preparatory programs are searching for proven best practices that will enable students to excel in and out of the classroom. More than requiring students to make good grades, a growing number of non-traditional programs with similar goals to the SAEP program—and that serve a large number of minority and low-income students—are also seeking to implement models that can build academic persistence; a skill that can be used for life.

The "B" Students Have a Chance to Shine

Some of the students who were asked about whether or not the Partnership's academic standard should be raised felt that it should remain the same. In one case, a student even recommended that it be lowered. In the case of Student # 21, she described the benefit of keeping the academic criteria the same, stating that, "It gives the B students a chance to get a scholarship"(personal communication, July 12, 2006). On the other hand, Student # 37 felt that the standard should be lowered to accommodate more students. He stated that, "I would make the eligibility easier for other students"(July 13, 2006).

Throughout the course of the interviews, none of the students who were interviewed complained that the academic standards were too difficult, but neither did they allude that there was a need to raise the grade point average to qualify for the scholarship. Although a number of students claimed that their graduation from high

school was not dependent on their being involved in the SAEP program, they felt that the financial award was important to their self-esteem, and it enabled them to defray some of the expenses when they entered college. None of the students felt that the program

Differences and Similarities between Hispanic and African-American Students

There were no major differences between the responses from both groups. The majority of the Hispanic and African-American students felt that anyone could succeed in the program, and that the academic standards should remain the same so that it would not jeopardize anyone's chance or receiving the scholarship incentive.

Summary

This chapter involved an overview of the study, interview process, qualitative analysis, including coding the data, thematic responses, and an extensive narrative interview. It also included supportive data from other authors and the researcher's perspective of the study. Primarily, the participants talked openly about their experiences in relation to the interview questions. Five themes were developed from the rich responses and stories narrated by the students from two cultural groups – Hispanic and African-American.

These thematic data, which are very informative and captivating, were not intended to represent the entire population of these ethnic groups, or that of non-study participants similarly settled. Significantly, the data express themes elaborated at a particular point in the ongoing lives of the 42 participants of this study. This chapter includes extensive data as told to the researcher by the participants. The goal was to have their story told with significance on developing themes, from which a rich tapestry can be

embraced. Chapter Five will provide more analysis by comparing thematic data with previous literature. Chapter Five will also provide further discussion on the findings, implications for future recommendations for programs, and a conclusion of the study.

CHAPTER V

SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Regard man as a mine rich in gems of inestimable value. Education can, alone, cause it to reveal its treasures, and enable mankind to benefit there from.

—Baha'u'llah

Knowledge is like a garden; if it is not cultivated, it cannot be harvested.

—African Proverb

Summary

It has been over 20 years since the groundbreaking report, *A Nation At Risk* warned the United States about the perils it would face if it failed to restructure its educational system successfully to accommodate the needs of millions of poorly educated students. Today, the nation is still at risk. And the problems are much the same: mediocre schools and weak academic achievement by our children (Manno, 1998). Some disturbing data show that that more than seven million children live in neighborhoods where the high school dropout rate is 23 percent or more, while data from the National Assessment of Educational Progress show that only one-third of U.S. 12th-graders read proficiently; a quarter can barely read at all, and fewer than one-fifth are proficient in math. Tom Vander Ark, director of education for the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation stated that, "A third of American students drop out, and half of Hispanic and African-American students drop out. That is a civic, social, and economic disaster (Vander Ark, 2004).

Most notably, the largest population who continue to suffer from the educational malaise sweeping the country are millions of minority children from low-income families, many of whom lack the institutional and financial resources needed to put them on a level playing field to compete with children from wealthier socioeconomic backgrounds.

As educators grapple to come up with solutions to solve this burgeoning problem, America's children continue to fail miserably in and outside of the classroom. The significant ripple effect precipitated by this ever-increasing dropout rate among high school teens is leading to a plethora of social ills in the form of unemployment, lack of technical skills, high rates of crime, drug abuse, and high rates of incarceration. The total social costs per year are a tremendous financial drag on society.

According to research done by Cecelia E. Rouse, a professor of economics and public affairs at Princeton University, high school dropouts contribute $60,000 less in federal and state income taxes over the course of a lifetime than individuals who receive their diploma. As a result, Rouse calculated that America loses more than $50 billion annually in federal and state income taxes, from the 23 million high school dropouts aged 18 to 67, an amount nearly enough to cover the discretionary expenditures for the U.S. Department of Education in Fiscal Year 2005 ($56.58 billion).

A number of other studies have shown that Teens who drop out of high school will find it difficult to achieve financial success in life. A report from the U.S. Department of Education notes, "In terms of employment, earnings, and family formation, dropouts from high school face difficulties in making the transition to the

adult world." (U.S. Department of Education, 2005)

As America moves further into the 21st century, educators will need to make a paradigm shift toward building collaborative educational partnerships within their communities, and forging their vision and resources with other institutions to promote excellence among students of all ages, regardless of race, ethnicity, or socioeconomic status. The old era which symbolized educational leaders working in silos to solve the educational challenges of their day is coming to an end, and a new era in which leaders from a diverse array of fields coming together to work for the prosperity and success of all students has dawned.

In an attempt to explore the success rates of at risk students who are specifically supported by Collaborative Educational Partnerships in the United States, the researcher became interested in exploring the experiences of students who are enrolled in the San Antonio Educational Partnership because its primary goal is to increase graduation rates among At-Risk populations in the city of San Antonio.

Purpose of Study

The purpose of this study was:

(a) To identity and describe the unique institutional factors of the Partnership program that contributed to the successful graduation of Hispanic and African-American students from low-income backgrounds within the San Antonio Independent School District

(b) To identify and describe the unique external (i.e. family, friends, mentors) factors that helped contribute to the successful graduation of Hispanic and African-American students affiliated with the SAEP program.

(c) To determine the key reasons and/or stimuli that attracted both groups of students to the program, as well as attempt to ascertain if the stimuli enabled them to stay in the program.

(d) To analyze those internal/institutional and external factors that led to students developing the academic persistence to graduate and advance to college.

The design of the research compiled real experiences, which could be used by educators and policymakers to determine if this model can be replicated in other parts of Texas, and subsequently, all throughout the United States. A replica of the SAEP program could be best utilized in diverse urban communities with large numbers of Hispanic and African-American populations. As a start, some of the urban locations in Texas where such a pilot program could be easily established are Houston and Dallas.

By engaging the participants in retrospective dialogue, it afforded them the opportunity to become involved in providing helpful information about their experiences in the SAEP program, for the purpose of making the future experiences of new graduates more purposeful and productive.

Throughout the process, the participants were reflective, providing meaningful insights that increased the value of the findings, as well as compared the rich experiences from two culturally distinct groups. To conduct the study, the researcher interviewed 42 participants individually by phone, which allowed them to reflect and interpret their

experiences without being influenced or threatened by the responses from other participants in the program. The researcher posed the questions to clarify the key factors that influenced academic persistence, and influenced students from both groups to enter college. This chapter will include a summary of paramount themes found in this research study.

Findings

The goal of this study was to understand how various internal (institutional) and external factors influenced the academic persistence and college choice decisions of the 42 participants in the SAEP program; and how these experiences were perceived based on cultural and ethnic distinctions associated with being Hispanic or African-American.

In order to gain a rich source of data by which to develop this understanding, questions were utilized in five sections to guide the dialogue. The responses from each of the participants' drove the dialogue within each session. The researcher used open-ended questions for the purpose of allowing each participant to freely express their thoughts and emotions. By speaking with each participant privately, it allowed him or her to express their opinions with no fear of being contradicted or challenged by their peers. The purpose of the researcher was to create an environment of mutual trust, with the realization that the information would be used solely to improve the SAEP experience for future participants.

The intent of the dialogue in each session was to engage each participant by posing questions that prompted a rich introspective description of their experience and stimulate a full examination of the factors that contributed to their success in the

program. The responses revealed that two components from within the SAEP program that were essential toward boosting academic persistence and success in the lives of the participants as it relates to graduation from high school and entry into college. These components consisted of:

(1) A structured counseling and mentoring program.

(2) The promise of financial incentives to attend college.

In regard to the research questions derived in this study, the participants' responses about their unique experiences in the SAEP program, provided ample insights into:

(1) How the program was run at both the high school and college level.

(2) How the program was perceived at the high school and college level from two different cultural groups.

While different perceptions about the SAEP experience were anticipated among the two cultural groups, it became evident that there were more similarities between the two groups than differences. The responses from both groups confirmed that in most cases, three binding conditions were essential toward gaining access to post secondary education. The three conditions (pillars) of support that were inherent in most of the student's experiences consisted of:

(1) Strong family support & encouragement to succeed

(2) A strong mentoring & counseling program

(3) A financial incentive leading to a scholarship award to attend college.

These three ingredients were recurring themes that became interwoven

throughout most of the interviews, and strongly indicated that each was mutually inseparable to the others. Based on the ongoing discussion with most of the participants, it was apparent that one condition without the other was insufficient to complete the journey from high school to college. However, there were a few exceptions, whereby some of the students chose not to meet with their high school and/or college counselor during their time in High school and college. Also, there were a few others, for example, who went through the SAEP program, but never received the scholarship because they did not know where to go pick it up. Despite this snafu, some students were still delighted to be a part of the program.

The 1,000 Mile Journey: In Search of the Promised Land (College)

If the trajectory from high school to college can be viewed as "A Journey," and the Promised Land can be described as a metaphor for entering college – then this final destination for low-income minority high school students moving throughout four years of uncertainty and unknown terrain can often seem like an "impossible dream." When compared to middle class students, low-income students are far less likely to graduate and enter college, due to a complex web of forces that are formidable in their scope, and devastating in their reach.

As a result, even with emergence of new reform movements such as No Child Left Behind on the rise, Hispanic and African-American students are still being significantly impacted by high drop rates, low-test scores, and a growing level of apathy toward academic excellence. Hoffman, Llagas, Snyder (2003) outlined some of specific

challenges that African Americans face in public schools. They claim that in 1999, 18 % of African American students in grades kindergarten through 12th grade had repeated at least one grade; 35% of African American students in grades 7 through 12 had been suspended or expelled at some point in their school careers; and 15 % received services under the Individual with disabilities (Hoffman, K.; Llagas, C.; Snyder, T, 2003, p.38; 32).

Stages of the Journey - Hispanics and African Americans Students in Public Education

Kindergarten to Elementary School

Studies have shown even in the beginning stages of the educational journey for Hispanic and African-American students, they are plagued with risk factors that far exceed what white and Asian students experience. Taylor (1991) points out that entry characteristics may be either risk factors or protective mechanisms, depending on the reaction that those characteristics produce in the environment. Some children enter kindergarten/first grade with characteristics that prepare them to meet the demands of school, and others bring behavioral characteristics that are at odds with classroom norms. For example, according to the National Center for Education Statistics, in 1998, 71% of African American and Hispanic children entering kindergarten had one or more risk factors, compared to 29% of those from White families and 61% from Asian families. On the other hand, the percentage of first time kindergartners with two or more risk factors was four times greater for African Americans (27%) and five times greater for Hispanics (33%) than for their White peers (6%) (Hoffman, K.; Llagas, C.; Snyder, T, 2003, p. 68).

Elementary to Middle School

According to Taylor (1991), the traits of successful first graders are the ability to postpone gratification, to be socially responsive, to maintain control over emotions, and to be in a positive frame of mind. Given the severe conditions in many urban communities, many poor African-American, Latino, or other minority youngsters do not enter school having mastered these characteristics, and as a result, their behavior does not conform to expectations of the teacher. If the child's behavior clashes with the teacher's expectations and norms, and triggers a negative response from the teacher, then that child will face increased risk. When African-American and Hispanic children from poor communities – urban or rural – lose the support of their teachers, the effects of this benign neglect have far reaching consequences.

Winfield (1999) claims that after the early grades, the relationship between the teacher and the student is critical for African-American and Hispanic youth. Although, at the third and fourth grade levels, teacher/student relations become less personalized, and the standards for classroom performance and achievement become more competitive, studies have shown that African American and Hispanic youth tend to excel when the relationship with their teacher is nurturing and supportive (Winfield, 1999). Unfortunately, many of these students don't have nurturing and supportive relationships with their teachers, and the risk of dropping out of school is increased when they make the transition to middle school/ high school.

Middle School to High School

During the middle school to high school passage, the risks become more

precarious for African-American and Hispanic students. At this stage in their development, students have more control to make decisions that will have a long-term affect on their future success in and out of the classroom. For example, one of the main challenges facing female teens is peer pressure to engage in early sexual activity. Scott-Jones (1991) has found in a survey that those students who tend to have children before completing high school received information from peers and had not received sexual education. For males, the peer group pressure often provides anti-intellectual pressures aimed at not being successful in schoolwork (Fordham & Ogbu, 1986). Even when parents are supportive of academic achievement some studies have shown that African-American youth face enormous difficulty finding supportive peers. (Steinberg, Dornbusch, and Brown, 1992)

High School to College (Promise Land)

The last four years of the passage from high school to college is undoubtedly the most critical stage of the entire journey for Hispanic and African-American youth trying to make it the Promised Land. At this stage of their journey, many teenagers in high-risk, urban environments lack the guidance and support in making the decision to go to college than teenagers who are raised in families of middle to upper middle class status. In a sample of African-American males, Wilson-Sadberry, Winfield, and Royster (1991) found that males who made the transition from high school to college and continued in postsecondary education differed from their counterparts who failed to make this transition. This study further revealed that two of the greatest stumbling blocks that prevented at-risk students from Hispanic and African-American backgrounds from going

to college were fatherhood and unemployment.

It also found that students who make a successful passage over to the Promise Land were more likely to report that their mother had an extremely large influence on theirs lives. Some of the other critical discoveries made in the study were that students who were most likely to not to go to college met the following profile:

- Was on a vocational track
- Did not have high aspirations to go to college
- Was not guided or directed by Teachers, counselors, or parents
- Was overage
- Did not understand the career options available from getting a college degree

Other factors that play a part in preventing youth from making the passage over to college are the "drug culture," high unemployment, and negative media portrayal of African-American males. These all serve as risk factors that affect African-American and Hispanic students' decisions about career options available and continuing education.

Predictable Consternation vs. Academic Security

Based on the precarious stages of this journey, countless numbers of Hispanic and African-American children continue to wander into the proverbial desert of despair, not realizing that they will soon become a statistic like the millions that have come before them. McLeod (2005) has labeled this plight a "predictable consternation," and states "It seems as if a silent salience and acceptance of this trend is pervasive, inevitably precipitating the acceptance of a chronic academic and social injustice for the African American (and Hispanic) student. The public school system has tragically failed in its

responsibility to provide academic security and equitable opportunities for the minority student, specifically the African American student."

A study by Plank and Jordan (2005) also has shown that the country's top-achieving low-income students never go to college because they and their parents did not plan for college well. Because these students didn't take SAT's when they should have, or select courses that appeal to college admission offices, they failed to pursue going to college like the other college bound students. The study also found that many had made false assumptions that they could not afford college and, therefore, never applied. Plank and Jordan's study signifies the need for school administrators, faculty, counselors and parents to work together to provide pre-college information, support and guidance to urban adolescents. More importantly, the counselor serves as the nexus to making this transition happen more smoothly. However, without an overhaul in the system to increase more guidance counselors to support the students who need this service most, the trend of high drop out rates and disengagement among teens at risk will continue to persist.

Other Perceived Obstacles

In summary, the data from the interviews reveal the perceived obstacles and shared opportunities that both Hispanic and African-American students shared during their transitional journey from grade 9 to grade 12. In discussing how low-income children and youth cope with the many problems they face in the public schools system—ranging from a lack of good teachers to inadequate resources—some educators have theorized that children making the passage from grades one through six experience a lack of encouragement and very little validation from their teachers. In most cases, a

supportive and nurturing environment is rarely found in schools with high concentrations of low-income, minority children. As these students continue their passage through grades seven to nine, studies indicate that over half are considering the option of dropping out of school by the time they reach the 9th grade.

From grades ten to twelve, the remaining students have firmly decided if they will drop out by the 11th grade. At this point in the journey, studies have indicated that even the high achievers from among at-risk students somehow get disoriented, and eventually give up on their dream of going to college. Therefore, for many at-risk students, the only pillar many of them have to lean on for support and encouragement are their parents, extended family members, and/or friends. However, without a mentor/counselor to guide the process (i.e., filling out college applications, registering for the SAT/ACT exams, and applying for financial aid) reaching the Promised Land of opportunity becomes an unrealized dream.

It was not surprising to find out that by default, the participants from both groups said that the two most important aspects that they valued in the SAEP program was the scholarship and the role of the counselor. The reason the participants only offered two responses was because there were no other major components of the program to choose from. Although the students did not receive any monetary support during their time in high school, the promise of receiving the scholarship upon graduation at the college of their choice was a strong incentive for staying in the program.

In the case of both Hispanic and African-American students, the research has identified various factors that are significantly associated with strengthening their resolve

and giving them the academic persistence necessary to graduate from High School and enter college. The themes that are mentioned in the findings are:

1. The Incentive (Getting the Scholarship)
2. The SAEP Counselor (High School & College Support)
3. Encouragement & Motivation From Family and Friends
4. Staying On Track & Achieving my Academic Goals (Going To College)
5. Anybody Can Succeed In this Program

All of these themes that were uncovered in the interviews reveal the conscious needs that each of the participants had as they made their own personal journey from their start in the SAEP program in 9th grade, until their final passage into college, which was a defining moment that culminated into their realization that the program helped them realize a dream. While all of the students may have not shared a connection with all five themes, it was evident that most of the participants strongly identified with at least three of the five themes throughout their tenure in the program.

Despite all of the perceived barriers that stood in the way of these students making the passage from the 9th grade, the one thing that was common to their survival and resiliency throughout the process was their reliance on family. What became evident throughout the some of the interviews is that several students were not fully engaged in the program, and only joined the Partnership in their last year of high school to receive the scholarship. When they were asked if they were influenced by the SAEP counselor, they admitted that they had not met with the counselor and were not really familiar with the program.

Moreover, when these same students were asked about the other facets of the program, they also said that they had not benefited from the program and did not participate in any of the events that had taken place. Notwithstanding their total absence from the Partnerships activities, and almost no help from the counselor, they were able to succeed without any intervention from the Partnership over the four years they were in high school.

Despite their differences, the one thing that they had in common with the other students was their dependence on family support, which became the most indispensable pillar that helped most of the students to gain the academic persistence needed to graduate. Although the pillar of financial subsistence was very important to all of the participants, in terms of how they were able to pay for college, the availability of money was not sufficient in and of itself to assure that these students would have had the persistence or the resilience to make the final leg of their journey into the Promise Land.

Nonetheless, all but two of the students expressed the importance of their families, and even gave examples of the how their parents warned them against doing things that would put them in their future in jeopardy. One of the students recalls how his parents warned him over and over not get a girl pregnant or his future would be doomed. This goes back to the statistics that show the biggest threat to at-risk youth in urban environments is fatherhood and unemployment.

The other threats that these students were told to avoid were drugs, gang banging, and a life of petty crime. While the families gave them the initial guidance which was crucial to them staying on the right track, the SAEP program was able to bring structure

to these directives, and give the students hands-on activities that were able to help them feel apart of a vehicle that was taking them somewhere positive. Based on the three-pillar model of support, the first pillar will be discussed based on how the students responded to the questions about support from their families. Although each student claimed that most of their emotional support came from within their families, it became clear that in most cases, there was one key person who seemed to wield more influence than the other. Despite several claims from students that they did not receive support from their families to pursue postsecondary education, it was evident that over 95% of the respondents did.

The next section will review how important the family support was in this process, and determine if there were any similarities between what was shared by the Hispanic group of students, as compared to the African-American group of students.

Family Support – Building Survival Skills and Resiliency

For both groups of students, the responses all throughout the study verified that family support was overwhelmingly the most crucial determinant that boosted their academic persistence, and ensured their entry into college. Out of a total of 30 Hispanic respondents, only two claimed that they did not receive any support, and out of a total of 12 African-American students, two students also claimed that they did not receive any support. When the Hispanic students were asked who had the greatest influence on them within their families to stay in school and go to college, 12 respondents (40%) said their mothers; 11 respondents (36%) said both their mother and their father; 3 respondents (10%) said their fathers; and 2 respondents (6%) said a family member other than the father or mother.

What was compelling about these responses is that almost half of the Hispanic students who were surveyed claimed that both parents played a key role in influencing them to stay in school and pursue a postsecondary education. Furthermore, what reinforced this parental support even more was that almost half of the students surveyed said that other members, both within the immediate family, as well as the extended family, added to this support. Among the 12 respondents who made this claim, the additional supporters that they acknowledged as giving them more resilience to withstand the external threats of not graduating included sisters, brothers, aunts, uncles, grandmothers, grandfathers, sister-in-laws, and even boyfriends. Based on these responses, it was apparent that most of the Hispanic students who talked about their families, demonstrated the evidence of close family ties, and a high level of solidarity among all of its members. In discussing the strengths of the Hispanic family, Garcia (2001) concurred that "Research with Hispanic families compared to Anglo American families suggests that there are closer relations and greater loyalty among members, more frequent visitation of relatives, parental encouragement of family-centered orientations in their children…and fewer decision making-making opportunities for the children."

Matute-Bianchi (1991) also purports that "Most, but not all, of these successful Hispanic (Mexican–descent) students indicated that one reason for their success in school was their parents' interest and support. Family encouragement stemmed from a strong parental desire that their children achieve more than they had been able to here or in Mexico" (pp. 240-247).

In comparing the responses of the African-American group of students to the

Hispanic group of students, the obvious similarity between both groups was that almost all of the students received unflinching support from their families. On the other hand, there was a stark difference between both groups concerning who had the greatest influence from within their families. In contrast to the Hispanic families, the African-American participants overwhelmingly named their mother as the number one influence and supporter in their decision to go to college. Based on the twelve responses, 8 respondents (66%) said their mothers had the greatest influence; 2 respondents (16%) said their fathers had the most influence; and the other 2 respondents (16%) said no one had an influence on their decision to go to college. What was interesting about these responses is that almost all of the support given to the African-American students was attributed to the mother. When these results were compared with the Hispanic responses, it indicated that there was more of a balance of influence from both parents in the Hispanic families, as well as extra support being given from other members in the immediate and extended family.

Despite the similarities in socioeconomic status between both groups of students, demographic studies indicate that the primary reason for this lack of influence from African American fathers—and other family members in the African American family—can be partially attributed to the high rate of single parent families being headed by African American women. Other ongoing research has estimated that that there has been a dramatic rise in the proportion of African American children born out of wedlock, and that it is the result of a sharp increase in childbearing among unmarried African American women.

This detrimental trend of unwed births among African-American teens indicates that African American children are about half as likely as white children to be living with both parents. The 2002 U.S. census report found that African American children are about half as likely as white children to be living with both parents or with one parent and a stepparent (41 percent versus 81 percent); they are about eight times more likely to be living with a never-married parent (31 percent versus 4 percent); and they are more than half again as likely to be living with a separated or divorced parent (25 percent versus 14 percent) (U.S. Census Dept. 2002).

Although the African American respondents in the study, when compared to their Hispanic counterparts, did not receive high levels of encouragement from extended family members to graduate from high school and pursue a college education, there was no evidence that the influence and support from the mother was in any way less effective than that from Hispanic parents. Could this lack of support in the home be a potential reason why so many of the African-American students desired to spend more one-on-one time with the SAEP counselor? The next section will provide some insights in how the support from the family, ties into the guidance and mentoring from the SAEP Counselor.

The Two Tiered Counseling System – Separate But Not Equal

One of the most valuable assets of the Partnership program at the High School level, as explained by both groups of participants, was undoubtedly the SAEP counselor. Although many students initially signed up for the program because of the promise of getting the college scholarship, over time, they found that the guidance and mentoring they received from the counselor was invaluable. For the most part, the responses from

both groups of students infer that if a student entered into the SAEP program at the 9th grade level, he/she would have the chance to develop a bond with the counselor that would include receiving help with college preparatory issues, attendance, financial aid, and other important matters pertaining to entering college. In comparing responses between both groups about their engagement with the SAEP counselor, approximately 74% of the Hispanic students claimed that they were totally satisfied with the services, while 50% of the African-American students claimed that they were fully satisfied with the services.

When the African-American students were asked what they felt could be improved concerning the counseling services, the most common response was that they wanted to spend more one-one-one time with the SAEP counselor. Despite this concern about not having enough time with the SAEP counselor, many of the African-American students felt that the High school SAEP counselor was helpful, responsive, encouraging, and supportive in helping them to achieve their goals.

Feelings About the SAEP College Counselor

On the other hand, the feelings about the SAEP college counselor drew mixed reactions. Although several students from both groups had positive things to say about their SAEP college counselor, most of the students acknowledged that due to their busy schedules, they had never met the counselor. Some of the other comments fell into the following categories:

- Did not have a positive bond/relationship with counselor.
- Had only met with the counselor once or twice.

- Had never met with the counselor or did not know such a service existed.

When most of the students from both groups were asked why they did not take advantage of the counseling service, they usually responded that since it was not mandatory to meet the counselor, they never got around to visiting the office. Other responses included that they did not have the time to visit the office because of their work schedules and other commitments; or they had friends who graduated from the program years before that gave them advice in lieu of the counselor.

Group Meetings with the SAEP Counselor

What became evident from the responses is that group meetings with the SAEP college advisors were not held as often as students had expected. Some of the Hispanic students explained that whenever they needed advice about a college matter, they would go back to their old high schools to solicit guidance from their high school SAEP counselors. Others respondents, on the other hand, replied that they regularly seek help from regular college counselors on campus if they can't meet with the SAEP counselor.

Satisfaction Survey Results

When both groups of students were asked if they were happy with the services offered by the SAEP college counselor, only 23% of the Hispanic students claimed they were happy, compared to only 9% of the African-American students who stated that they were satisfied with the counseling services. The major difference between both groups of students is that the African-American students continued to wish for more one-on-one meetings with the SAEP college counselor, while many of the Hispanic students seemed to be more complacent about the situation. Because of the good relationships that some of

the Hispanic students had with their former high school counselors, they continued to meet with these same counselors in College.

The results of the research indicated that the counselors at the high school level, acted out of a sense of urgency to meet the needs of their students, while the college counselors seemed to be more willing to assist the SAEP students only when the students came directly to them for help.

Other findings from the study seemed to verify that the SAEP students at the high school level tended to be better informed and more involved in the yearly SAEP activities than at the college level. Although the students at the college level desired to meet in groups in order to stay abreast of yearly SAEP activities, they were not summoned to any meetings throughout the year by the SAEP college counselors.

Ticket to Paradise

The primary motivator that keeps thousands of students interesting in joining the SAEP program is the scholarship incentive. Without the promise of receiving a scholarship to attend college, many of the students responded that they would not have joined the program. For some, the scholarship was viewed as the one thing that kept them feeling firmly grounded in the program until they graduated. For others, the promise of getting the scholarship influenced students to maintain a “B” average, and for others, it totally eased their fears concerning where they would get future money to finance their college education. Even students who said that the scholarship did not influence them to join the program said that the money was an extra bonus that made them feel good about their accomplishments in the program. For others, receiving the scholarship was a

significant event, because it was the first time in their lives that they were given a monetary award based on merit.

When both groups of students were asked was the scholarship award sufficient to meet their needs, over half of the Hispanic students (16) said yes, while over two-third of the African American students (8) said that they were satisfied with the amount. When the students who were not satisfied with the current scholarship amounts asked how much the award should be increased by, most of them responded that it should be doubled from roughly $175 to $300 dollars.

During the course of the interviews, it became obvious that some of the students from both groups did not start off in the SAEP program from their 9th grade year, and some were even approached to join the program as late as their 11th or 12th grade year based on their high grade point averages. As a result, when these students were asked to share their experiences of being in the program, they had no idea what the program had to offer, nor did they have any personal experience meeting with the SAEP counselor or taking advantage of the other events and services.

What was evident from these late enrollees (in the SAEP program) is that they only joined the program to receive the scholarship. When these students were asked did the program help them to graduate, most of them replied that they were solicited to join by the SAEP High School counselor because of their grade point average. These students conveyed that they could have graduated from high school and entered college without the help of the SAEP program, but also indicated that receiving the scholarship had been very helpful toward paying for their college expenses.

Programs and Auxiliary Services

The two main components of the SAEP program that were considered valuable by the most the students from both groups were the scholarship and the mentoring services provided by the counselors. When the students were asked about other components of the program or services that made a difference in their life, many of them did not recall participating in many events or programs outside of meeting the counselor periodically throughout the year. When students were asked to discuss extracurricular events associated with the SAEP program that they had attended while in High School, only five people were able to recall attending such events out of all 42 participants. The same lack of involvement was recalled from most of the students about their involvement in SAEP programs and events at the college level. Unfortunately, students from both groups did not report attending any events while they were students in college.

Conclusion

As educators and policymakers push to find ways to close the achievement gap in Texas by the year 2015, collaborative educational partnerships are destined to play a more pivotal role toward helping both Hispanic and African-American students succeed in going to college. The importance of this momentous effort was outlined by Pam Willeford, the Chairperson of the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board (THECB), when she stated that, “No other challenge facing Texas is of greater importance than the challenge posed by closing the educational gaps before us.” In describing the severity of the challenge, Willeford explained that, “For more than a decade, our population has been growing faster than the number of people enrolled in and graduating from college. If this

trend continues, our population will steadily become less well educated…frankly painting a very bleak future for our citizens and for our state unless we can change the trends."(Strom, 2001) The four key goals of THECB's "Closing the Gaps" plan include the following:

- Close the gaps in participation rates across Texas to add 500,000 more students.
- Increase by 50% the number of degrees, certificates and other identifiable student successes from high quality programs.
- Substantially increase the number of nationally recognized programs or services at colleges and universities in Texas
- Increase the level of federal science and engineering research funding to Texas institutions by 50% to $ 1.3 billion.

Closing the Achievement Gap

THECB's plan delineates to some extent what strategies need to be executed in order to achieve the long-range goals of the Close the Gap campaign, and places a large share of the responsibility on the shoulders of colleges and universities to forge partnerships with the business community, public schools, and other community based organizations.

The plan also recognizes that such a vast undertaking will have to include ensuring that parents and students are involved in understanding the importance of a college education; that more advanced training will need to be offered to elementary and secondary teachers; and that more incentives will need to be created to motivate larger

numbers of students to apply to college.

However, THECB's plan does not provide recommendations on how these strategies will be devised and executed at the local level, nor is there anything mentioned about how such a vast number of minority students – many who have no support from their families - will be mentored and guided through the pre-collegiate process. Some of the other important solutions that were not included in the plan, but cited by Ohio Sate Senator, C.J, Prentiss, who is the convener of the Ohio Close the Gap Campaign includes, "…ensuring that students have teachers who are culturally competent, providing extra funding for intervention programs, including after-school, in-school, summer school, and Saturday program, to bring students up to (par) grade level" (Prentiss, 2004).

Achieving the Dream: Providing A Multi-Dimensional Solution

Allan Alson, who is the superintendent of the Evanston Township (Illinois) High School District stated that closing the achievement gap between white and minority students is "An incredibly multi-dimensional problem, which is not limited to instruction alone; or early childhood literacy, or peer pressure, or culturally relevant curriculum, or tracking. Each and every issue needs a strategy attached to it" (Rothman, 2002, p. 3).

Based on the research and findings of the SAEP study, the interviews revealed that low-income students are faced with more risk factors than students from middle class backgrounds. Furthermore, the research indicated that the solutions to their problems were not one-dimensional, but required a series of strategies and support mechanisms to ensure that they were able to successfully graduate pursue postsecondary education opportunities.

Three Pillars of Support

The research demonstrated that many of the students who successfully matriculated through the program, had three pillars they could rely on, and these consisted of: (1) the promise of financial support to attend college, (2) the unconditional encouragement, guidance, and support from a high school counselor, (3) and the ongoing support of their parents and family. While pillars (conditions) one and two were tied directly to the internal operations of the SAEP program, the third pillar (condition) was based on the students' ties to the external environment. (See Appendix # 2)

Financial Support

Nonetheless the responses from the students indicated that all three conditions were not mutually exclusive, but complementary and essential to their success. Based on the surveys of each student, the driving fear that threatened to keep them out of college was the lack of financial support. A number of studies have shown that many low-income students cannot afford to go to college without scholarship support and/or reduced tuition options. However, despite the significant financial aid options, college "sticker prices," even at reduced rates, remain a barrier to first-generation students. Therefore, even if a first-generation student was an outstanding student and could get accepted into a top-notch institution such as University of Texas at Austin, Baylor, or Rice University, there is a strong possibility that without the promise of ample scholarship offerings, he/she would forego the opportunity and attend a local community college. As a result of the rising college costs and the decline of family incomes, low-income students will continue

to view the financial scholarship as their one source of support in their effort to attend college. (NGA Center for Best Practices, 2006)

Mentoring and Counselor Support

In regard to the theme about mentoring and support from the SAEP counselor, this positive intervention contributed greatly to helping students attend college. The SAEP counselor was able to play a multi-dimensional role that included giving the student (1) high educational aspirations, (2) keeping them updated concerning their academic progress and attendance, (3) and helping them prepare for college entry.

The respondents from both cultural groups described the SAEP counselor as "being there for me," and as a result of this positive support, several students continued to see the same SAEP high school counselor even after they had entered college. Various programs in other parts of the United States have also incorporated using a counselor to motivate low-income Hispanic and African-American students.

For example, the ALAS (which means wings in Spanish) and is an acronym for Achievement for Latinos through Academic Success provides its students with a counselor-advocate who works as a case manager to ensure that all the components of the intervention are provided as needed. Also, the Puente (bridge) Project out of California is currently active in 39 community colleges throughout California, and is an outgrowth of a successful community college program that began at Chabot College in Hayward, California. This program combines innovative teaching and counseling methods with community involvement. What makes this program unique is that the Puente counselor works closely with the students and their parents to ensure that students' enrollment in

college prep courses and the parents' support of their children's academic progress (Gandara, Larson, Rumberger, and Mehan, 1998).

Another similar program that targets Hispanic students is ENLACE (Engaging Latino Communities for Education) which is a W.K. Kellogg initiative, and is a comprehensive community-based partnership that works to improve educational outcomes for Hispanic students within the Albuquerque Public Schools. The Project goals of ENLACE is to lower the Hispanic dropout rate in grades K-12, and mentors are provided to assist at-risk students. Another nationally recognized program that has given African-American students more individual attention is the Boston Annenberg Challenge program in Boston. As a result of the individualized attention and support, Boston has been cited as having the highest gradation rate for African-American students in the nation, 85 percent, and the fourth highest for Latinos at 68 percent.

Family Support

The common thread that was woven throughout the responses of the participants was that of family support. Out of all of the themes that were presented, the importance of family was the thread that made all of voices throughout the study consistent. Although it was evident that the Hispanic students had more support from both parents, and other members of their extended families than African-American students, it was obvious that African-American mother's played a dominant role in positively influencing their children to attend college. The research from this study verified that the major three pillars (themes) that represented financial incentives, counselor intervention, and family support, were complementary and essential to the success of both groups of students.

Based on these initial findings, broader efforts should be applied toward bringing more alignment between these three areas under the programmatic direction of the San Antonio Education Partnership Office.

Recommendations and Implications

The research that was undertaken to study two groups of students (Hispanic and African-American) involved in the San Antonio Partnership Program provided useful information about some of the key factors that influenced college choice, and led to the successful entry of low-income students into postsecondary education. The research also demonstrated that cultural differences among the students do matter and that in some cases, programs should be customized and adapted to meet the specific cultural, social, and psychological needs of the group that is being served.

In the interest of building more effective collaborative partnerships like the San Antonio Education Partnership, it will behoove future administrators to consider how they can foster a tighter bond of communication between students, families, and school counselors. It is clear from the findings that the influence and support of both parents on their children is irreplaceable, and that more can be done to involve them on the front lines as volunteers, community mentors, and servant leaders. By building more unity between these cross-sections of support, students will have a wider human network to rely on as they make their educational journeys from high school to college. As the doors of globalization swing wide, so must the path to education, providing the access and opportunity to millions of students who will otherwise be left behind (Walker, 2006).

In this regard, such a big transformative process will only be possible as greater collaboration is forged between student's families, schools, and communities. "It will take a more enlightened village (of experts) to raise a brighter generation of children" (King, 2006). Based upon the findings of this study, the following recommendations for practice in San Antonio Education Partnership include the following:

Involve Parents and Family Members to Serve as Volunteers. While many of the students' parents supported their involvement in the SAEP program, they were not directly involved as volunteers, mentors, or planners. More should be done to keep them abreast of their child's progress, and keep the lines of communication open between all of the parties that have a stake in the student's success. If possible, a parent/family support Council should be formed which will give the parents a chance to provide suggestions, and feedback about how the program can be improved and best operated.

More Counselors Should be Hired at the High School Level. A common complaint among students was that there were not enough SAEP counselors at the high schools to meet their individual needs. Some requested that more SAEP counselors be hired so that all of the students in the program could be better served.

While hiring an additional counselor at each of the high schools may not be financially feasible at this point, some consideration could be given to hiring a few counselors to work as part-time support counselors to support the work of the other counselors at each of the high schools. In particular, a number of African-American students stated that if they could improve anything in the program, they would like to spend more (one-on-one) time with the SAEP counselor.

College Counselors Need to Be More Proactive in Serving Students. The college counselors need to find ways to reach out to students and make them feel a part of the SAEP community. Excluding the San Antonio College campus, many of the students who entered other colleges did not feel a connection with the college counselors, nor were they aware of the SAEP activities on campus. As a result of this disconnection with the program, many of them returned to their high schools to seek help from their old counselors. In some instances some of these students did not even know that a SAEP college counselor was on their campus. The college counselor needs to have periodic group meetings with all of the students, and strive to get them to become acquainted with each other.

There Should be a Citywide Best Practices Event for the Counselors. Because of the strategic role of the counselors, there should be a citywide retreat where they can come together once a year and share best practices information. There should also be some information shared about specific students who need more assistance and support when they make the transition to college. Also, the counselors should explore ways in which they can tap into the parent and family resource pool to recruit volunteers for special on-campus events. These individuals could be trained to help out in crunch times, especially during the start of the fall semester each year.

The SAEP Scholarship Should be Increased (and Released). While over 50% of the students were happy with the scholarship amount, it is evident that more needs to be done to boost the scholarships to make the program more appealing to a larger pool of students. Because of the increasing college costs, and the overall rise of inflation on a

yearly basis, the current community college scholarship amounts should be doubled $175 per semester to $300 a semester. For Public universities, the amount should be increased to $500 a semester, and for private universities/colleges, the amount should be boosted to $1000 a semester. The other condition should be that if a person is majoring in the math/science/engineering programs, they should automatically get a supplemental increase of $200 a semester, in addition to the regular scholarship. Many students in the technical fields felt that they needed more scholarship dollars to cover the costs of supplies and books than the general fields. The adjoining recommendation is that students who get accepted at other universities/colleges in the state of Texas should also be able to receive the SAEP scholarship. As long as they attend an accredited college or university in the state of Texas, they should not be penalized for leaving the city of San Antonio to pursue an education elsewhere.

Implement Internship/ Job Shadowing Program. Because many students seem to only be interested in the Partnership for the scholarship, there needs to be a career component for students to take advantage of after they enter college. This program could be offered to students with a 2.5 or higher grade point average, and allow them to earn a summer wage as they gain experience in a particular field related to their major. The job-shadowing component could be offered to high school students, and the paid internship could be offered to the college students.

Implement a Buddy System – College Life for a Day. Several of the students said that they wished that they could have visited a college campus when they were in high school, and spent time with a College SAEP student for a day. Because of the fear

that some the SAEP students have about college, there should be a recurring opportunity for high school students in the program to meet other SAEP students who are in college.

Support More Programs/Events. The high school counselors should plan more events that enable students to visit colleges and universities. There should also be a certain number of events that students need to be involved in to qualify for the scholarship.

Student Involvement Should be Increased. More students should be encouraged to work as ambassadors and special assistants to help the counselors in the program.

Recommendations for Further Research

This study has examined 42 students (30 Hispanics and 12 African-Americans) in the SAEP program who successfully graduated and enrolled in colleges throughout the city of San Antonio. However, a wider sample of African-Americans should be studied, to see what are the variances compared to the final results of this study.

The 42 women and men in this study allowed us to understand, from their perspective, the major influences that helped them to be successful in this project. Their stories were about their struggles to undertake a very uncertain journey that relied on the support of their families and other resources allotted to them in the SAEP network. It also allowed for us, as educators, to understand how important collaborative ventures are in supporting people to persist in reaching their educational and personal dreams.

Additionally, this study has revealed that, besides the influence of the families, the counselors are in the forefront of making the biggest impact on the students. Most notably, the high school counselors provided the students with the encouragement and

guidance necessary to keep them engaged in the sticking to the goal of graduating and entering college.

The following recommendations could also be pursued for further study, in order to understand how the ambiguous losses affect the immigrant's identity at a community college:

A beneficial study would entail a follow up on these participants in three years and reveal their progress. It would be valuable to learn how these individuals involved in the SAEP program will view the program in the future. How much credit in years to come, would they give the program in helping them to attain their dreams?

Find out about the students who did not succeed. It would be very important to find out why students did not stay in the SAEP program. What were some of the major factors that led to them dropping out of the program?

Conduct a quantitative study to determine the rate of persistence and academic completion for students from the very inception of the program. If collaborative partnerships are going to thrive, more studies will have to be done in order to evaluate how much progress is being made from year to year with graduation rates, and enrollment into colleges and universities. So far, over 2,000 students enrolled in the SAEP program have graduated from colleges and universities since the inception of the program of 1988. However, until there is a future study to determine how many students have dropped out of the program, and for what reasons, not much will be learned about how the SAEP program can be improved beyond what was gleaned form the results of this study.

APPENDIX I

Questions for the SAEP Research Project: 18 Questions

A. Reasons for Joining

1. Tell me about how you got involved with the SAEP program?

2. Tell me your main reason for sticking with the program?

3. What do you think are some of the reasons why others joined?

B. Institutional Factors that contributed to success

1. Tell me how the SAEP program affected you? What impact it had on you?

2. Tell me about your High School advisors?

3. Tell me about the programs that were offered at the High School level?

4. Tell me about any incentives at the High School level

5. Tell me about your College Advisor?

6. Tell me about your programs at the college level?

C. External Factors that contributed to success

1. Tell me about any support from your family in High School?

2. Tell me about any support from your friends, mentors, or people in the community?

3. Tell me who was most supportive?

D. Improvements/ Changes

1. Tell me about how the program can be improved?

2. Tell me what is the programs strongest point?

3. Tell me what is the programs weakest point?

E. Resources

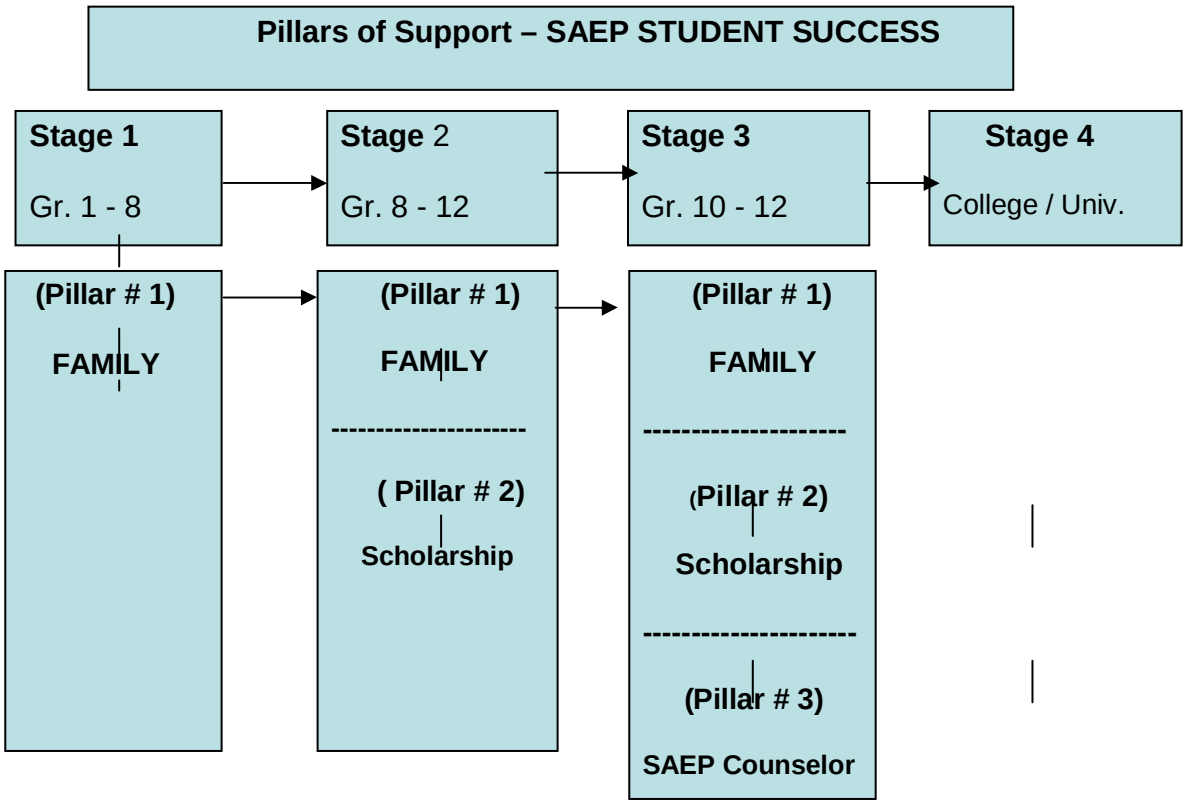
1. Have you declared a major yet?

2. Tell me about your scholarship – Is it adequate?

3. Tell me about the school you are in now – is it what you want?

APPENDIX 2

Jonathan's Pillar of Support Model



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VITA

Jonathan King was born in Albany, Georgia on June 27, 1957. He graduated from Morehouse College with a Bachelor of Arts degree in Business Administration in 1980, and subsequently earned a Master of Arts degree in International Relations from the International University of Japan in 1989. After working in Japan for Sony Music Entertainment and Warner Japan as a Music Executive, he returned to the United States and worked as an Academic Advisor for the Maxwell International Bahai School in British Columbia, Canada. In 1998, Mr. King earned a Master of Arts degree in Education at the Harvard Graduate School of Education, and continued to work as an administrator in various capacities at the Maxwell School. He later relocated to the United States and worked for the Bahai National Center in Chicago as a Fund Development Officer and Educational Programming Coordinator.

Mr. King began his doctoral study in the Community College Leadership Program at the University of Texas in 2004. During that time, he worked at Austin Community College as a Transitional Education Specialist for At-Risk Populations, and in the Student Affairs Department as an Academic Advisor. He later served as an Administrative Intern at the Northwest Vista College in San Antonio, and worked on special projects that were tied closely to the Dual Credit Program, Retention, and recruitment aimed at special populations. He pursued his research in school/college collaboration under the direction of Professor William Moore.

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