PREUDHOMME, PATRICK A. Ph.D. College and Career Readiness and its Impact on the Lives of Minoritized Secondary School Students in North Carolina. (2024)
Directed by Dr. Leila Villaverde. 335 pp.

This research study aims to examine College and Career Readiness (CCR) curriculum as it is experienced by North Carolina's Native American, Latinx, and African American secondary school students. The project was conducted using an Art Based Research methodology and a Critical Race Theory framework and it was focused on the impact that CCR curriculum has had upon the lives of minoritized students. Eleven college students from Thompson State University were interviewed in an initial round of conversations about their CCR experiences. The interviews were conducted virtually, using the Zoom conferencing platform, and the data was analyzed to produce a travel list for visiting all of the schools and communities that the study participants attended for secondary school. Black and white photographs were taken of these schools and the negatives were later developed and printed in a makeshift darkroom in the home of the researcher. These prints were then analyzed to formulate second-round and focus group questions which were then used for the next two rounds of data gathering. Publicly accessible school documents were also analyzed for information pertaining to college and career readiness.

The study participants were exceptionally frank during the conversations and the data that they provided suggests that CCR curriculum is not being provided equally to all secondary school students in North Carolina. Many of the students were acutely aware of instances when they felt that they were being discouraged from taking a challenging college-preparatory curriculum or were not receiving the support necessary to successfully matriculate at a competitive-admission college or university. One of the major discoveries was the significant role that school guidance counselors played in determining the collegiate futures of their student caseloads. The study has limitations, but it contributes to the body of CCR knowledge.

COLLEGE AND CAREER READINESS AND ITS IMPACT ON THE

LIVES OF MINORITIZED SECONDARY SCHOOL

STUDENTS IN NORTH CAROLINA

by

Patrick A. Preudhomme

A Dissertation
Submitted to
the Faculty of The Graduate School at
The University of North Carolina at Greensboro
in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Doctor of Philosophy

Greensboro

2024

Approved by

_____
Dr. Leila Villaverde
Committee Chair

DEDICATION

I would like to dedicate this dissertation to the diverse groups of individuals who provided the patience and encouragement necessary for me to complete this project. First and foremost, I would like to thank my wife, Dr. Felicia Preudhomme, for her willingness to make the sacrifices which were necessary to see my program through to its completion. We have had the pleasure of studying our first undergraduate degrees together at the same university (where we met), as well as completing our terminal degrees concurrently at the University of North Carolina Greensboro. We push each other academically, and I am so proud of your accomplishments in your field. I would also like to thank my children for their understanding when my academic commitments limited my accessibility during the past eight years. I am glad that all of you appreciate the value of education for everyone in our family.

I am deeply indebted to the eleven study participants who were willing to sacrifice their time and provide their personal narratives for my research study. I have been touched by your willingness to share the stories of your academic journeys, and I am confident that you will all find success in your pursuits. I value your trust and sincerity, and our conversations were the most memorable part of this research project. Thank you for joining this research project which reflects the contributions of a whole village.

Finally, I would like to express gratitude to the countless educators with whom I have worked during the past two decades. I admire your willingness to make sacrifices for the young people who represent our legacy. I am hopeful that education policy can be changed, in the near future, so that you might receive the recognition worthy of your talents, sacrifices, and passion.

iii

APPROVAL PAGE

This dissertation written by Patrick A. Preudhomme has been approved by the following committee of the Faculty of The Graduate School at The University of North Carolina at Greensboro.

Committee Chair

Dr. Leila Villaverde

Committee Members

Dr. Tiffanie Lewis-Durham

Dr. Maria Di Benedetto

February 28, 2024
Date of Acceptance by Committee

February 28, 2024
Date of Final Oral Examination

iv

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I cannot fully express my gratitude for the guidance and assistance provided by my dissertation committee composed of Dr. Leila Villaverde, Dr. Tiffanie Lewis-Durham, and Dr. Maria Di Benedetto. I am especially thankful for Dr. Villaverde's keen insights, over the course of the past six years, since she was able to move me away from my fixed quantitative view of the world to a more nuanced qualitative understanding of human interaction. Your feedback was invaluable, and your critiques helped guide my work every step of the way. I truly appreciate everyone's willingness to serve on the committee, and I hope that I will be able to live up to your expectations in the future, since your collective mentorship has established a high bar for my future achievements.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF TABLES

LIST OF FIGURES

CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

Like most states in the country, North Carolina has a prescribed curriculum which all public-school students must follow, referred to as the North Carolina Standard Course of Study (NCSCOS). This standard course of study covers all kindergarten through high school grade levels (K-12), and all courses taken by North Carolina students, while they are being instructed in schools across the state. When education legislation like the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) is passed by Congress, the state modifies its curriculum in response so that it does not risk losing federal education funding. In order to prove compliance, high stakes testing of students is conducted, and schools that do not show adequate progress in meeting benchmark standards are sanctioned. Conservative education policymakers argue that testing is the best way to measure academic progress of the state's students, as well as classroom teaching compliance with the standard curriculum. When the Common Core Standards were adopted across the United States, in an attempt to standardize curriculum across the nation, North Carolina joined the movement and modified its standard course of study to include college and career readiness (CCR) objectives. As a consequence, CCR has become a buzzword for a curriculum framework which promises students in North Carolina access to postsecondary educations or meaningful career employment after graduating from high school.

The CCR curriculum framework has been applied to the academic programs of all public-school students in North Carolina without accounting for differences in culture, race, language, ethnicity, or other distinguishing social markers. This means that Native American, Latinx, and African American students in North Carolina's schools are all taught the same "readiness" curriculum, as the rest of their classmates, which is supposed to provide them with better lives after graduation from high school. The problem with the CCR curriculum model is that it

presumes it is helping all students, without measurement or analysis, and this suggests successful outcomes. It is certainly possible that CCR is beneficial for most students, or most White students in North Carolina, while at the same time it could be detrimental to Native American, African American, and Latinx (N/A/L) secondary school students who are not accruing the same educational benefits. To better understand the experiences of minoritized students, who have studied under the CCR framework, I interviewed eleven young adults who attended public secondary schools in North Carolina so that I might draw conclusions about the impact the curriculum has had upon their adult lives. If CCR is only helping students from the dominant culture enjoy academic and career success it potentially represents an example of covert racism, in educational practice, and this should be studied and exposed as another genre of social injustice in our society.

This qualitative study will review the body of literature regarding CCR curriculum, education policy, and the college and career patterns that impact the lives of N/A/L students in both the United States generally, and the state of North Carolina in particular. Young adults from across the state were interviewed individually, and in a focus group, to gain a better understanding of their lived experiences with CCR so that a void in the academic literature might be addressed. While there is ample literature about curriculum, and the experiences that N/A/L students have had in schools across the United States, there is a dearth of literature about the impact that CCR curriculum mandates have had upon their lives. This study hopes to address this shortcoming while bringing social justice issues related to standardized curriculum into the forefront for discussion. Finally, this study seeks to investigate the possibility that North Carolina's schools are promising that CCR will improve the lives of minoritized students while

simultaneously carrying out policies which place obstacles in their paths, and potentially prevent them from having equitable access to meaningful careers as adults.

Statement of the Problem: CCR in North Carolina

Public secondary school education was revolutionized in 2002 with the passage of the No NCLB legislation which updated the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (Joyce & Cartwright, 2018). NCLB made the bold promise that every public-school student in the United States would be prepared for the possibility of attending college, and it created an accountability regime which used mandated high stakes testing to identify "failing" schools. Problematization of "inferior" schools was strategic since it would justify the expansion of school choice programs, like vouchers and charter schools, which would allow more affluent families to exit public schools which had been integrated during the Civil Rights Movement. In 2015, President Obama signed the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) into law and it claimed that every student would be provided with an education that would deem them "college and career ready" so that all students regardless of income, gender, race, ethnicity, disability, etc., would have equitable opportunities for both social and economic advancement in society (Paulson, 2010). This federal mandate would be implemented in North Carolina, in addition to the other forty-nine states, and it would lead to the labeling of hundreds of schools across the state as "failures" due to their school report card grade of an "F." This dramatic grading scheme disrupted the social fabric in the state since two consecutive years of "failure" would place schools in jeopardy of being closed, while allowing for the expansion of school choice plans which would siphon money away from traditional neighborhood public schools. The students leaving their neighborhood schools, to take advantage of choice programs, carry tuition dollars with them and the marginal loss of revenue to the neighborhood schools can be problematic in terms of building

maintenance, classroom roster sizes, and discretionary resource spending. Considerable research suggests that this neoliberal educational policy, which presents itself as advocacy action for marginalized students, is really a scheme for resegregating schools and diverting public resources for the benefit of families who already enjoy considerable privilege. Worse yet, at the same time students were being marginalized and criticized by the ESSA accountability regime, African American and Latinx students were facing institutionalized hurdles, which prevented them from attending college even if they were deemed "college and career ready."

The proposed research project seeks to investigate the troubling problem of contradictory education policy in North Carolina which has placed undue emphasis on CCR while simultaneously passing legislation to discourage Latinx students from accessing education in either the community college or University of North Carolina (UNC) school system. Similar covert policies are being used to prevent African American students, especially males, from gaining access to the UNC system, so it is likely that these controversial policies are not accidental, but instead are part of a broader scheme to maintain White economic and social supremacy in North Carolina. To better understand these contradictions, several bodies of literature will be reviewed including education policy, critical race theory, college and career readiness as a whole, minoritized college enrollment, and minority career placements. Reviewing these bodies of literature will provide a context for better understanding the implications of CCR as it impacts the lives of N/A/L secondary school students in North Carolina.

Purpose of the Study

This research study will examine the experiences that N/A/L secondary school students have had with the CCR curriculum framework in North Carolina. While there is significant

literature which suggests that schools in the United States are treating minoritized students in a discriminatory fashion, their personal stories can provide important evidence regarding the real impact that CCR is having on their adult lives. Since state mandated CCR curriculum standards are imposed upon students of color in North Carolina, these students should be able to articulate and discuss their lived experiences so that the promises of college and career opportunities can be evaluated. If CCR is truly intended to assist all North Carolina students, in better preparing for adult lives in the workforce, then the subject participants should be able to provide anecdotes and examples of how the curriculum was beneficial for both college preparation and participation in the workforce.

In addition to evaluating the experiences that N/A/L secondary school students have had with CCR, the study will also explore the possibility of contradictory school system policies which prevent minoritized students from enjoying the benefits that CCR is supposed to offer. Some of the study participants may have had secondary school experiences which prevented them from enrolling in postsecondary schooling, or maximizing their career opportunities in the workforce, and these disconnects are of particular interest for this research project. Identifying contradictory educational policies will provide the opportunity for confronting discriminatory practices, where they exist, while also providing a foundation for educational reform efforts. If CCR is not helping North Carolina's minoritized secondary school students lead better lives as adults, the curriculum framework should either be modified or replaced with another educational model which truly provides equal opportunities for all students.

Research Questions

1) How have North Carolina's Native American, African American, and Latinx students been
   impacted by the state's College and Career Readiness (CCR) curriculum framework?

a) How do North Carolina's N/A/L students perceive the state's CCR curriculum in terms of their educational and career experiences?

 b) How are North Carolina CCR curriculum standards reinforced or supported by the experiences of N/A/L students?

Background Context

Federal school reform initiatives have shaped education policy in the state of North Carolina, but they have largely failed to deliver on their promises that "Every Student Succeeds" or that every student will be "College and Career Ready" when they graduate from high school. N/A/L students are less likely to benefit from the glowing promises of these education policies, which appear to favor affluent White students in schools which are becoming increasingly segregated over time. The promise of a college and career ready education, for all North Carolina students, is questionable because N/A/L students do not enjoy the same educational opportunities that are afforded their more affluent White counterparts in schools with better resources. Obstacles that limit access to higher education have also thwarted the dream of attending college for many minoritized students, who statistically have higher college and high school dropout rates and are consequently more likely to live in poverty as adults. There is also a question of whether schools in North Carolina are collecting the appropriate college enrollment and career placement data to make good on the CCR promise which is often referenced in their published documents. An issue of concern, for this research project, is the possibility that the CCR promise is completely hollow for many minoritized students and is simply being used as a diversionary smokescreen to attract public attention away from the high stakes testing practices which are being used to maintain the inequitable status quo.

6

With the passage of the NCLB education legislation in 2002, a new era of school accountability began which was dominated by the viewpoint that primary purpose of schools was no longer the nurturing of better adults for society but instead a cadre of pupils who could succeed on standardized testing (Noddings, 2015). This approach to education was yet another step in the movement away from the Dewey based model which suggested that curriculum should provide for an educative experience as opposed to a sterile learning process where test results were the singular end goal (Stuckart, 2022). Once this neoliberal standards-based accountability (SBA) approach to education became firmly entrenched by federal legislation, it became the new model for standardized curriculum, and this was especially evident with the adoption of the Common Core Standards and the CCR framework in 2010 (Noddings, 2013). To better understand the pervasive nature of the SBA approach to education it is important to note that while a Republican president started the process, Democratic Party politicians have also embraced this approach to education reform as a manner of proving that they are also serious about reforming education.

One of the primary reasons for widespread CCR support is that it presents a false choice of two good options to education stakeholders; college readiness for privileged students and the promise of access to career oriented jobs for the rest (Conley, 2010). Unfortunately, the modern information-driven economy does not provide abundant high-paying jobs to individuals who do not have college training, and this has meant that the students who do not have access to the rigorous courses necessary for college preparation are instead being diverted to the low-paying service industries where jobs are still abundant (Royster et al., 2015). Another significant problem with the CCR framework is that college readiness requires rigorous academic coursework in secondary school and many N/A/L students are being pushed into less rigorous

curriculum tracks, when they enter middle school, which leaves them with career readiness as their only option as they enter high school (Alvarado & An, 2015).

Career and technical education (CTE) courses have been used as a means of providing career readiness, but they usually provide the best opportunities when they are coupled with postsecondary academic programs which require taking courses at a community college or similar institution (Hyslop, 2006). According to "Cut to the Core" (2014), traditional four-year degrees might not be desirable for all students graduating from high school, but because of the vocational stigma that has traditionally been attached to CTE programs there has been a lack of support for their expansion in secondary schools. Murillo and Trinchero (2019) view this debate from a civil rights perspective, and they argue that the best way to increase CCR for minoritized secondary school students is to promote a college-for-all agenda which increases both enrollment and retention of first-generation college students. This approach, while not widely favored, is arguably the most innovative and reform-oriented pathway for providing legitimate CCR to N/A/L students, with fidelity, since many of them are also first-generation college enrollees who face similar retention challenges while studying in college.

CCR curriculum models have widely been criticized for the institutional obstacles which appear to prevent equal access for N/A/L students. These obstacles include a lack of counselors in secondary schools, discriminatory tracking practices, and the lack of college-bound school cultures (Arriero & Griffin, 2019; Welton & Martinez, 2014; Conley, 2010). Additional challenges include the need to fully integrate CCR curriculum with multi-tier-systems-of-support (MTSS) for students with documented academic and behavioral profiles (Morningstar et al., 2018). Due to the lack of resources that many schools with large populations of minoritized students face, one strategy for successful CCR implementation has been the engagement of

external agents who provide one-to-one mentorship and act as advocates for students who are interested in attending college (Gutierrez-Ocampo, 2020). This strategy has been effective in pilot programs since the mentors are often culturally attuned to the students they are working with and they also help to reduce the student-to-career-counseling ratio which is often as high as 320 students per counselor or even 800 per counselor in extreme cases of underfunded schools (Brown, 1992; Gutierrez-Ocampo, 2020).

The real problem with CCR curriculum frameworks is that they are implemented in a race-neutral fashion without considering the unique needs of N/A/L secondary school students. While CCR curriculum might be serving the needs of privileged White students in North Carolina's schools, it is clear from the abundance of academic literature that students of color have been neglected with regards to college readiness. Therefore, the CCR default has been to divert minoritized students to low paying jobs in the workforce. CTE programs, which are supposed to provide a career training alternative for students who are not college bound, work best when they are coupled with postsecondary schooling, so this has not been a viable option for equitable diversion. CCR curriculum programs are essentially flawed if they do not provide equitable college readiness, and this shortcoming must be recognized so that CTE instruction might provide equal career opportunities for all students in North Carolina.

Methodology

This research project was conducted using Arts Based Research as the methodology and Critical Race Theory (CRT) as the theoretical framework. Researcher generated photographs were used to capture the secondary school contexts of the research participants and provide centerpieces for the second-round interview questions. The CRT framework was used as a lens for uncovering practices which are discriminatory in nature and disadvantage N/A/L secondary

9

school students in North Carolina. This approach utilized my black and white photography

background, for the Art Based Research, while relying upon the narratives of minoritized

students, and the scholarship of CRT researchers. to gain a better understanding of the role that

race is playing with regards to CCR delivery in North Carolina.

Methods

In order to gather the necessary data for this research project, several distinct methods of

data collection were employed. This data consisted of interviews with N/A/L young adults who

were secondary school students in North Carolina and studied under the CCR curriculum model,

as well as documents from schools and the state department of public instruction (NCDPI),

photographs of participants' secondary schools and communities, and focus group sessions.

Zoom interviews were conducted with eleven research participants who met the selection criteria

(minoritized adults aged 23-39) and responded to the recruitment flyer (Appendix A). A hybrid

sampling method, which used targeted snowball sampling, was used to continue the recruitment

of participants until eleven first-round interviews were conducted. Photographic research was

employed to capture images of the campuses where the participants attended secondary school

after these sites were identified from the data collected during the first-round interviews. These

photographs were used during second-round photo-interviews, with the study participants, to

rekindle memories and provide a visual data set for the research study. This visual data set was

then used to verify information provided during the interviews as well as provide a photographic

set of documents for analysis with respect to the research topic. The final set of interviewing

data was gathered during a focus group meeting with three participants who were willing and

able to participate at the scheduled time. The questions for the focus group were generated from

a review of the previous interviews and provided the study participants with the opportunity to

voice their experiences with other individuals in a less structured meeting environment with minimal participation on the part of the researcher. This was particularly important, since dialogue with other students who may have had similar experiences was likely to be more open and indeterminate, providing the opportunity for valuable narratives which might not have been generated using scripted questions from the researcher. Additionally, placing the researcher in the background provided the study participants with greater agency since they quickly forgot about the researcher as they had conversations which were largely self-moderated.

Data was also gathered for textual analysis by browsing school websites for Purpose, Mission, and Vision statements. District websites were also reviewed for documentation pertaining to CCR objectives and curriculum information. The textual analysis of all written documents, including the interviewing session transcripts, was facilitated using the Atlas.ti program which uses artificial intelligence to scan text for words or phrases for coding purposes. Once first-pass coding was completed, additional coding passes were conducted to develop themes for organizing the research data. This iterative process facilitated the extraction of patterns and inductive statements which were then corroborated by the whole of the collected data.

Conceptual Framework

Critical Race Theory is the theoretical framework being utilized to guide this qualitative research project. Critical race theory was used as a lens to forefront the role that race plays in the unique experiences of students of color in all aspects of their lives, including educational settings. Data was analyzed with an alertness for discriminatory practices which signal the existence of racist or race-neutral curriculum practices in the schools being studied. These practices might include seemingly innocent education practices such as high stakes testing of

11

students who have limited fluency with the English Language. Other inequitable practices might include promotion and retention policies, which were applied to students of color in a discriminatory fashion, causing them to be disadvantaged as they progressed through secondary school. While the focus on this study is on CCR curriculum practices, they are also impacted by disciplinary policies which keep students out of the classroom leading to low levels of performance on mandatory assessments. Other educational practices, which were scrutinized using the CRT lens, included tracking, access to advanced courses and a rigorous curriculum, and the equitable provision of educational resources for students of color who have either 504 or Individualized Education Plans (IEPs). The use of the CRT framework for this study will be discussed in further detail in the Critical Race Theory section of Chapter 3.

Significance of CCR Research Study

This dissertation topic is meaningful because it examines the lived experiences of N/A/L secondary school students when they studied under the CCR curriculum framework. While there have been numerous studies detailing racial inequality in schools, in addition to scholarship about curriculum, there has been little written about CCR and minoritized secondary school students in North Carolina. This study will attempt to fill this void by contributing to the body of knowledge which links specific curriculum frameworks to the real-life career and college experiences of N/A/L students who are marginalized in secondary schools. Furthermore, the study will attempt to uncover gaps between stated school policies and the actual practices which often work in direct contradiction due to race-neutral institutionalized curriculum practices.

Since this study examined the secondary school curriculum experiences of North Carolina students, who are now young adults (ages 23-29 years old), it should serve to illuminate any inequitable practices which have contributed to lower levels of career and educational

attainment as they prepared to enter the workforce. This is important because education is a key to social mobility and economic security in the modern American economy, and curriculum practices may be playing a role in further disadvantaging students of color in our society. In addition, this research project provides a voice for N/A/L adults who may have felt disadvantaged because of their curriculum experiences in secondary school. Articulating these experiences might provide the impetus for them to intervene and advocate for their own children, or other minoritized students, as the next generation makes its way through the secondary school system in North Carolina.

Overview of Chapters

Chapter 2 provides a literature review of topics relevant to the study of CCR and students of color. It begins with a study of the literature associated with critical race theory and race-neutral educational policies to establish a lens for understanding how curriculum policies can act to disadvantage one group of students while privileging another. The literature review continues with an analysis of scholarship examining curriculum policy and minoritized students, before specifically focusing on CCR and how it impacts their high school graduation rates, college matriculation, college graduation rates, and employment opportunities in the workforce. This comprehensive study of academic literature, which is relevant to the topics of curriculum, education policy, CCR, educational opportunities, and discrimination, is beneficial for highlighting the value of the proposed research study.

The third chapter outlines the research methods and methodologies that were employed in the research project. The methodology employed in this qualitative study is Arts Based Research, while the methods used are Narrative and Photographic Research. A pilot study which was completed for ELC 764 during the fall semester of 2021 was used to field test the

interviewing process and begin work on the literature review. This experience provided invaluable hands-on exposure to qualitative research methods which have been refined for this research project. The methods chapter also details the sampling strategies, as well as the use of focus group meetings and second-round interviews, which were used to gather additional data after the analysis of the first-round interview data was completed.

Chapter four presents the vignettes of the study participants in order to introduce them to the reader and provide background information which will be useful in understanding their individual academic journeys. The fifth chapter presents the visual landscapes by introducing the secondary schools attended by the study participants, as well as data collected from their publicly available documents. The photographs of the schools are also presented in this chapter to provide a pictorial reference for the data which they provided for the study. Chapters four and five provide the bulk of the raw data which was then analyzed through repetitive coding passes to deduce the themes that defined the experiences that minoritized students had with CCR curriculum while in secondary school in North Carolina.

The sixth chapter, CCR Curriculum and Minoritized NC Secondary School Students, provides an analysis of the data collected from the three rounds of interviews and school documents, in order to provide answers to the questions about the impact of CCR curriculum upon the lives of Native American, African American, and Latinx students. The final chapter, chapter seven, provides a discussion of the project's findings, the implications of the research study, and the conclusions which the researcher reached as a consequence of this academic endeavor.

CHAPTER II: REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

In order to fully understand the implications of CCR, and how it impacts the lives of N/A/L secondary school students in the United States, it is important to study the intersectionality of education policy and critical race theory. Education policy is manifested in curriculum policy which provides the instructional guidelines for teachers in the classrooms across the country. When a state adopts CCR as a curriculum framework for instruction it is suggesting, in a race-neutral fashion, that all secondary school students will have enhanced academic and career placement opportunities which will provide security and employability in their futures. This review of the literature will provide a study of curriculum policy in the United States and how this has impacted the current CCR framework which has been used to instruct African American and Latinx secondary school students in North Carolina. This study will provide a foundation for better understanding the experiences that minoritized youth have had, with regards to CCR curriculum, as they attended secondary schools in preparation for high school graduation and the opportunity to either join the workforce or enroll in a college for postsecondary academic studies.

Education Policy and Critical Race Theory

Critical race theory is foundationally based on the proposition that "race continues to be a significant factor in determining inequity" and for this reason the research project is strongly intersectional with both critical pedagogy and education policy (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 2006, p. 12). Delgado et al. (2017) describe critical race theory as the study of the relationship between race, racism, and power "in a broader perspective that includes economics, history, setting, group and self-interest, and emotions and the unconscious" (p. 3). This theoretical framework is appropriate for examining education policy due to the convergence of economics, self-interest,

special interest groups, and school settings, with issues of race in education. While hegemony can act as a social factor of oppression against a wide range of underprivileged societal groups, it is often organized along racial lines because of the visible racial markers which are difficult to shield from public view. This is painfully obvious from the pattern of discrimination which still persists in the United States and has now turned violent because of the protests for and against the Black Lives Matter movement. For the purposes of this research investigation, critical race theory will primarily focus on the oppression against Black and Brown people as ethnically described by the terms Native American, African American, and Latinx. While the comingling of ethnicity and race can be academically problematic, it is consistent with the patterns of hegemony in the United States since the lumping together of N/A/L individuals has become systematic.

CRT and Education

Critical race theory can be traced to work by Carter Woodson and W.E.B. Du Bois who both suggested that race was "*the* central construct for understanding inequality" in the United States (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 2006, p. 14). This pattern extends to educational contexts, and Ladson-Billings and Tate argue that demographic markers of gender and class do not explain "the extraordinarily high rates of school dropout, suspension, expulsion, and failure among African-American and Latino males" (2006, p.15). Instead, their discipline is often initiated over dress code violations which deviate from the hegemonic standards of White mainstream society, and this leads to an alienation from educational institutions based on cultural/racial differences (Zamudio, et. al, 2010). What is even more ironic and telling, about the strength of hegemony, is that these mainstream norms are imposed on students in urban schools where White students are a small minority. One of the consequences of the high dropout rates, and workplace

discrimination against minoritized individuals, is that the "unemployment rate for African

Americans and Latino/as over the years has remained more than double that of whites" and this

has meant a high rate of poverty for their children (Leistyna, 2007, p. 115). Prospects do not

improve much for students of color who are able to navigate the challenges of discrimination

during their K-12 education, since institutions of higher education are also complicit in race-

based discrimination against African American and Latinx students (Dixson & Rousseau, 2006).

Some of the educational challenges, for students of color, are incidental byproducts related to

their attempts to become mainstreamed into the dominant society and they include feelings of

isolation from their neighborhood peers (when taking Advanced Placement or other rigorous

courses) as well as the adjustment challenges caused by reconciling their family values with the

values of the dominant society with which they are conforming (Lopez, 2010).

White Hegemony

One of the challenges that defines critical race theory is the role that White privilege

plays in the maintenance of hegemonic practices. While many forms of hegemony are centered

around demographic markers such as education, wealth, etc., White privilege conveys "unearned

advantages, or the *state* of being dominant" simply because of a combination of "white skin

color...Hair texture, nose shapes, culture and language" (Leonardo, 2004, p. 37). McIntosh

(2020) has documented a list of 26 privileges that she enjoys as a Caucasian woman, which

exclude her friends of color, and she suggests that if she were also male, she would gain the

benefit of an additional 20 societal privileges. While the focus of critical race theory consciously

excludes the study of gender, it should be noted that the societal locus of privilege and

supremacy is the heterosexual, White, protestant male. The fact that race alone creates almost

two dozen identifiable privileges, without including other markers, suggests that race is a

defining characteristic of both privilege and oppression in the United States. Critical race theorists are strongly critical of orthodox Marxist scholars who attribute the racialized treatment of African Americans and Latinx people to class-based distinctions, which privilege the more affluent, since they argue about causation (Leonardo, 2009). While it is true that race can be an indicator of economic status, the reverse is simply not true. An African American or Latinx individual is significantly more likely than a Caucasian to live in poverty but living in poverty does not cause a person to change their race from White. In fact, "white poverty usually lasts only for a generation or two (even for white immigrant families); not so for the black or brown variety—it is apt to last for forever" (Delgado et al., 2012, p. 123). This is especially evident in the southern states prior to the civil rights legislation of the 1960s since being a poor Caucasian afforded a person (male or female) many protections and privileges which were not accessible to even wealthy African Americans. This was confirmed by the Supreme Court's rulings in both the *Hall v. DeCuir* and *Plessy v. Ferguson* cases, which established separation of races in public transportation as a constitutional right of Whites (DeCuir-Gunby, 2006). The fact that both Josephine DeCuir and Homer Plessy were affluent, and so fair skinned that they could not be readily identified as black, did not protect them from discrimination when using public modes of transportation, since their legal race disqualified their enviable economic status. While the truth about race in the United States is distressing, the evidence that race is a primary indicator of social inequality, by numerous measures, is undeniable.

Race-Neutral Discrimination

Many Caucasian people in the United States do not recognize the advantages that they accrue due to their racial privilege, but this does not mean that they are racist; rather, their unwillingness to acknowledge White privilege allows racism to flourish. Since White privilege

is granted without tacit acknowledgment, Whites would have to carry out "race treason" by renouncing the privileges of their "whiteness" through actions which include marriage to a person of color since the stigma attached to this act can place them in positions of discrimination with which they were not previously accustomed (Leonardo, 2004). However, doing nothing allows someone to claim that they are not racist, while maintaining the privileges that accrue to members of the White community because of racism. Bonilla-Silva decries what he refers to as "color-blind racism" since it represents a new kind of racism which can be "seemingly nonracial" because it allows Whites to protect their privilege by "opposing all kinds of interventions to deal with racial inequality" (Bonilla-Silva, 2015, p. 1364). Bonilla-Silva is especially critical of this modern iteration of racism because it provides ideological cover for individuals while they protect racist practices to ensure that their monopoly of privilege is maintained and nurtured. While Bonilla-Silva rightfully criticizes former president Barack Obama for enabling color-blind racism during his presidency, he overlooks the political reality that Obama was unable to carry out a progressive agenda, during his second term, because he faced a hostile Republican Congress. Obama clearly fell into a racial trap when he criticized "young Black men...like an average White man would" during his Morehouse Commencement Speech in 2013 (Bonilla-Silva, 2015, p. 1368). President Obama was playing a double hand since he was trying to reassure his immediate African American audience about racial prospects in the nation, while simultaneously letting the larger White audience know that he was not going to upset the nation's status quo.

Color-blind racism is often manifested by race-neutral policies which appear to promote merit as the qualifier for social rewards or opportunities. In this framework, "whiteness attempts to construct itself as just another racial experience...arguably a minority and marginalized group

in its own right" (Leonardo & Dixon- Román, 2018, p. 1386). This societal paradigm is damaging to N/A/L students because it creates a competitive school environment under the pretext of leveling the playing field. This means that students of color often do not have equal access to college preparatory courses, and they face an uphill battle in college admissions because of the over-emphasis on standardized test scores like the SAT and ACT (Hodge et al., 2008; Zamudio et al.,2010). This is race-neutral discrimination in action since recent trends have indicated double digit decreases in African American attendance at predominantly White colleges and universities because of the combination of racialized policies which include "litigious attacks on affirmative action...inadequate information about opportunities for funding and difficulties in obtaining financial aid...and...an increase in tuition and fee costs which disproportionately negatively affects Black, Hispanic, and poor students" (Hodge et al., 2008, p. 935). The combination of these race-neutral policies has been disastrous in terms of racial diversity on college campuses, since they are now beginning to mirror K-12 school systems in terms of the trend towards re-segregation by race. This should not be surprising, however, since the public sentiment which helped to elect President Trump in 2016 was clearly aligned with his "Make America Great Again" slogan which was a clear reference to the Jim Crow era in the United States.

White Spaces

It appears that race-neutral policies are being used to reclaim White spaces, such as college campuses, through the covert use of micro-aggressions, and the silencing of voices of diversity due to admissions policies which do not account for differences in prior opportunity due to race. Not only are students of color facing challenges in these environments, which appear to be unwelcoming, but "the dominant discourse within the mainstream research

community devalues the scholarship of faculty of color" (Dixson & Rousseau, 2006, p. 36). Students in college now face the same problem that they have faced their whole lives; their teachers do not look like them and potentially do not value their individual diversity. This has been a challenge for N/A/L youth in both K-12 schools, and higher education, where the majority of their teachers will be White, meaning they have had to navigate a "white-normed meaning system" in addition to meeting the academic requirements of their courses (Leonardo & Manning, 2017, p. 24). Solórzano et al. (2000) have documented the challenges faced by college students of color due to the constant stream of micro-aggressions to which they were subjected by White faculty and students. The consequence was the creation of "academic and social 'counter-spaces' on and off their campuses...as sites where deficit notions of people of color can be challenged" (Solórzano et al., 2000, p. 70). These counter-spaces include Black fraternities and sororities, Black Student Alliances, and other networks that serve either social or academic support needs. One of the unfortunate byproducts of this self-advocacy is resentment by White students and faculty members who cannot understand why students of color need racial/ethnic enclaves. The patterns of alienation, that students of color face, have taken a toll on the college completion rates for African American students who have a graduation rate of "approximately 45 percent, which...is about 20 percent lower than the rate for whites" (Delpit, 2012, p. 178).

Discriminatory Educational Practices

Ferguson (2010) has contributed to critical race theory discourse with her research on the militant regulation of the behavior of minoritized youth. Many school rules have been crafted to single out and punish students of color, creating an effective school-to-prison pipeline which begins their acclimation for a life of incarceration and conflict with authority (Hallett, 2006; Buras, 2022). Shedd (2015) supports this contention since her research indicates a strong link

between school policing and security policies that appear to be preparatory training for a life behind bars. One of the disturbing consequences of this societal trend, of criminalization of youth, is the loss of citizenship privileges, like voting, due to conviction for non-violent crimes. The over-criminalization and policing of N/A/L youth is not only filling our prisons to capacity, but also disenfranchising a vulnerable cross-section of society since they will no longer be able to engage in civic society as equal citizens (Delgado et al., 2012). The discrepancies in referrals for students of color, as opposed to their White counterparts, is startling and it is suggestive of a racial bias in educational institutions which routinely discipline African American children at a statistically higher rate than Caucasian students (Morris & Perry, 2017). What is even more troubling, is the evidence that "educators punish African American and Latino students more severely than whites for the same or similar behavior" suggesting a clear racial bias (Morris & Perry, 2017, p. 129; Zamudio, et al., 2010). This over-policing of students of color is even carried out by middle-class teachers of color who also stereotype their students because of a class divide that further complicates issues of race (Carter et al., 2017). If teachers of color are problematizing the behavior of minoritized youth, their White colleagues are shielded from accusations of bias and the vicious cycle of oppression is allowed to continue unabated.

Much of the research reviewed focused on critical race theory as it impacts discrimination being systematically carried out against Latinx and African American students at all levels of their educations. Another component is the intersection of critical race theory with school policies which either attempt to bring about equality or are complicit in the denial of equal opportunities for children of color. Gillborn (2014, p. 37) suggests "a CRT perspective on race and education views policy as acting to preserve the status quo and defending as normal a state of white supremacy" as opposed to the propagandized stance that society is gradually

moving "toward ever-greater equality and social justice." Thus, the naive view of the

achievement of a post-racial society in the United States is completely rejected by the

overwhelming evidence to the contrary. DeCuir and Dixson (2004, p. 28) argue that "myriad

policies and practices that restrict the access of students of color to high-quality curricula, and to

safe and well-equipped schools...have served to reify this notion of Whiteness as property" so

that the benefits of our education systems are not equally distributed along the racialized lines of

color. This argument is supported by the trend of legal challenges that have been eroding the

Brown v. Board of Education ruling by "Restricting access by refusing to consider race as a

factor" when "Black and Brown working-class students" attempt to enroll in competitive high-

quality schools (Dixson, 2011, p. 823). In the Supreme Court case *Parents Involved in*

Community Schools vs. Seattle Public School District (PICS), White parents successfully argued

that using race to favor students of color, as a tiebreaker in admissions decisions for the most

desirable schools, was a violation of the 14th Amendment. This was a curious ruling, which was

made by the conservative court's majority, since the 14th Amendment was originally ratified to

protect the rights of African Americans, and it was now being used to promote inequality in

favor of White students. Since the goal of the school district's admissions policy was balancing

racial enrollments to prevent segregation, the Supreme Court's ruling was clearly aimed at

"dismantling of not only *Brown* but also the infrastructures that support the 'Black and Brown'

working-class" to appease a privileged White constituency (Dixson, 2011, p. 822).

The Latinx community has been victimized by acts of racism which are uniquely aimed

at their students because of the intersectionality of their culture, history, and often precarious

legal status in the United States. In Arizona, the Republican State Superintendent of Public

Instruction launched a legislative push to ban the culturally responsive teaching methodologies

of the La Raza Studies department in the Tucson Unified School District. This battle culminated in the 2010 passage of Arizona's HB 2281 which specifically outlawed classes or programs which promoted ethnic solidarity or used materials that discussed issues of "racial oppression, colonialism, and self empowerment" (Leonardo & Harris, 2013, p. 485). This racially targeted legislative action was suspect because the La Raza Studies program enjoyed a high graduation rate and superior academic achievement, which exceeded the statistics for the White population. This was clearly unacceptable, because it provided a narrative which undermined the traditional stereotype of White academic superiority in K-12 education. Clearly, Arizona legislators were more concerned with maintaining "educational apartheid" whereby "students are denied access to educational materials not covered by standardized tests" in order to maintain the illusion that only White students excel in school (Pellegrino, 2015, p. 2388). In other states, policymakers are engaged in efforts to discourage the school enrollment of unauthorized immigrant children by requiring that their parents disclose their immigration status as "part of a larger plan to discourage migrants from living in their states" (Pellegrino, 2015, p. 2388). This is troublesome since it is clearly an attempt to circumvent the Supreme Court's 1982 *Plyler v. Doe* ruling, which prohibited charging tuition to unauthorized immigrants as a condition of school enrollment, due to the "importance of education for creating a pathway to upward social mobility" (Burciaga, 2016, p. 164). Many states are practicing contradictory policy enactment since they are supposed to comply with federal school accountability regimes, which require improvement in the achievement of Latinx students, while they are simultaneously subjecting them to racist policies that maintain White societal domination. Since racialized policies undermine the performance of Latinx students, it is virtually impossible for these states to expect academic improvement from them, so they resort to blaming their victims instead.

NCLB and Race

One of the last areas for examination is the role that NCLB has played in terms of further racializing the experiences of N/A/L students in the United States. NCLB specifically "targets improving four subgroups of student performance: minority children, students with disabilities, poor children and English language learners" and this often means double and triple classification in the accountability model for N/A/L students (Leonardo, 2007, p. 268). Many Black and Brown students fit a minimum of two of these categories, and in many cases can be classified in all four. An immigrant Latinx student who has a learning disability, in addition to having limited financial resources at home, could be classified in all four subgroups, and if they are doing poorly in school, it would wreak havoc on the school's accountability data. The school would risk being classified as "not achieving AYP" if a single "subgroup of students fails to demonstrate an increase in annual achievement outcomes" (Dunbar & McNeal, 2012, p. 209). Many African American students, who are often over-diagnosed with learning disabilities, can be classified in three categories simultaneously, so a school's performance data can be skewed by this overrepresentation in the accountability model. Clearly, this accountability model is flawed since it penalizes schools for the performance of students who have multiple subgroup identities, creating a situation that is outside of their control. When this practice is combined with racially discriminatory zoning policies, the concentration of students with multiple subgroup classifications becomes dangerously lopsided and exemplifies the false narrative that White students are fundamentally superior to students of color.

NCLB also contributes to the racialized treatment of African American and Latinx students through "a new requirement for secondary schools to provide military recruitment officers access to students' directory information as a condition of receiving federal funds"

(Castro, 2015, p. 9). This unique access to student data can only be prevented if a student's

parents or guardians proactively submit a written request asking the school to withhold this

information. The problem is that most parents and guardians are not aware that the data is being

shared and the procedure for preventing disclosure is not advertised so a "de-facto opting-in and

a tacit endorsement of what was previously considered illegal exploitation and theft" is carried

out by the military with impudence (Castro, 2015, p. 9). Minoritized youth are specifically

targeted since "the Pentagon would like to double Latino presence in the armed forces to 22%,

which would increase the current 60% of soldiers of color" so that a nation that is politically

ruled by Caucasians can be militarily defended by "a veritable dark wall of protection for

whiteness" (Leonardo, 2007, p. 268). The privileged members of society can enjoy the benefits

provided by a capitalist pro-business state, while an army of "our working-class youths" is

responsible for its defense and put their lives at risk for the offer of "a free education in the

military" (McClaren, 2015, p. 398). This stealth agenda, which is quietly nestled inside the

NCLB legislation, is just another example of the discriminatory design of education policy which

has always been racialized in the United States.

Education and Curriculum Policy

The topics and literature associated with critical pedagogy and critical race theory have

provided the foundation for a critical analysis of education policy in the United States, with

particular attention to the impact these policies have on N/A/L students. Education policy is not

accidental, and its intentionality often serves the interests of the dominant culture, as a

multiplicative act of hegemony since it can satisfy myriad objectives simultaneously. NCLB

legislation and the successor policies like the Every Student Succeeds Act, Common Core

Standards, and Race to the Top have served the purpose of reifying White superiority, providing

labor markets with immense pools of cheap labor, enabling recruitment efforts by the military, nurturing real estate values in targeted school zones, and returning the nation to a state of de-facto segregation in many public spaces (Gillborn, 2022). The review of education policy literature will illustrate the multiple methods by which policymakers carry out a hegemonic agenda while convincing a naive population that equity progress is being accomplished. This discussion will largely focus on the contradictions that this double-vision entails, such as a promise to prepare all students for college and career readiness, while placing insurmountable obstacles in their paths.

When President Bush signed the 2001 NCLB legislation, in 2002, he ushered in a new education policy approach which was supposed to implement evidence-based policy (EBP) "with the explicit aim of narrowing socio-economic- and race-based achievement gaps" in order to provide "equal opportunity" for all students in the United States (Joyce & Cartwright, 2018, p. 4). This was a lofty goal which would be continued by his successor, President Obama, who signed successor education policies like the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), and the Common Core Standards, which replaced the NCLB goal of "100 percent proficiency in reading and math in favor of getting all students college-and career-ready by the time they graduate from high school" (Paulson, 2010, p. 10). These new approaches to education reform represented a "standards-based accountability (SBA)" model which "has largely been a top-down policy, promoted by political and business elites and education reform groups that have framed the rationale in terms of economic progress and more equitable educational opportunities" (McDonnell, 2009, p. 420). While education reformers had a voice in crafting these policies, they were clearly dominated by the business interests which saw an opportunity to receive profits through the provision of testing services, curriculum guides, textbooks, and test preparation

materials (Saltman, 2009). In addition, businesses would have a voice in the "career" portion of the curriculum, and this would provide them with an ample supply of labor with rudimentary training since many of the students would not enroll in colleges. McClaren (2015, p. 384) criticizes this element of the SBA model since he argues that school systems are "not obligated to prepare students for anything more than the lowest-level jobs." Privileged students in "good" schools will be prepared for college, while African American and Latinx students in "failing" schools will be trained for menial jobs (Zamudio, et al., 2010) because the negative branding of their schools meant that a college preparatory curriculum would be almost impossible to access.

Zamudio, et al. (2010) suggest that education policy is primarily centered around issues of integration, student achievement, teacher quality, school choice, funding, government policies, and curriculum. Most education policy can be examined through one of these categories and all of them have significant ramifications for the schooling of minoritized students in the United States in general, as well as North Carolina specifically. While all of these education issues impact the educational opportunities of N/A/L students, some of them are more problematic than others depending on family demographics, neighborhoods, and the urban or rural setting where the students live.

Despite nationwide attempts to desegregate schools through court ordered integration policies, schools are becoming even more segregated over time and minoritized students continue to fight for access to quality schools in order to fulfill the lofty promises of the *Brown v. Board of Education* ruling of 1954 (Zamudio, et al., 2010). Seventy years later, public schools have become re-segregated, but because these patterns have occurred in a de facto manner, courts have been reluctant to intervene and N/A/L students across the country are not being educated in an equitable manner and are being pushed out of the best schools (Lynn, 2005). One

of the consequences of this pattern has been a well-documented achievement gap which maintains the false narrative that students of color are inferior because they have historically underperformed their White and Asian counterparts on standardized tests (Douglass Horsford & Grosland, 2022). Perez, et al. (2021) argue that this has especially hurt Latinx students because it has created a normalization of education failure for their population. Furthermore, standardized testing is complicit in placing obstacles in the pathway of N/A/L students who wish to attend college because admissions decisions often place a heavy emphasis on SAT and ACT scores (Zamudio, et al., 2010).

Teacher recruitment and quality is another education policy which directly impacts the education of students in North Carolina and across the nation as a whole. There is currently a shortage of qualified teachers which is impacting school districts across the country, but the impact upon minoritized students is often exacerbated by district policies which do not promote equitable school assignments of teachers, but instead allow highly skilled veterans to gravitate towards the "good" schools instead of where they are needed the most (Zamudio, et al., 2010). An additional challenge is that the vast majority of teachers in the country (80% in 2011) are White females who are teaching in schools that have student populations where the majority of students are classified as non-White (Leonardo & Boas, 2022). This has led Rousseau Anderson and Cross (2022) to suggest that school districts need to place an emphasis on the local context through the use of urban teacher preparation programs so that they might better address the needs of marginalized student populations.

School choice initiatives have become commonplace in North Carolina, but this trend simply mirrors what is happening across the country as school districts manipulate recent court interpretations of the *Brown v. Board of Education* ruling. Henry (2021) argues that school

choice movements represent a neoliberal market-based effort to maintain White privilege in

public schools and he maintains that this is occurring because White students dominate the

enrollments at charter schools across the nation. He cites exceptions to this trend in cities like

New Orleans, where 90% of the students in charter schools are minoritized, but he also points

out that 64% of these White students are in the top ("A" grade) charters schools while only 15%

of Black students enjoy this opportunity (Henry, 2021). Buras (2022) laments the fact that

charter schools are expanding across the nation despite accumulating evidence that their

performance is often lower than the established district-run schools, against which they compete

for students, and they are not being evaluated by the same accountability models. This is

especially true in North Carolina where the lieutenant governor withheld a report, which

criticized the performance of charter schools, from the public because it was too negative and did

not present a balanced snapshot of their merits (Spees & Lauen, 2019; Dalesio, 2016).

Curriculum issues often dominate school policy discussions and the impact upon

minoritized students can be dramatic because "what" is being taught in schools directly impacts

their future opportunities for social advancement. Cole (2017) argues that schools in the United

States have adopted corporate values and promote the monocultural values of the dominant

society resulting in increased White hegemony. Zamudio, et al. (2010) support this contention

and question the appropriateness of foisting a Eurocentric Western Canon upon a student

population which is now predominantly Brown and Black. Furthermore, NCLB legislation

places particular emphasis on English language development through the English Language

Acquisition Act, thus devaluing the skills and social capital of bilingual students (code for

Latinx) for whom English is a second language (Zamudio, et al., 2010). Perez, et al. (2021)

express frustration with school policies which require students, for whom English is a second

language, to be diverted into English Language Learner (ELL) classes which represent the lowest academic track in most schools. A further problem is the erosion of time spent teaching in subjects other than English, Math, and Science, which are the only tested subjects in North Carolina middle schools, and a half-hearted attempt to teach bilingual education as an elective as long as the second language (often Spanish) is subordinated to English (Zamudio, et al., 2010). McClaren (2016) is dismissive of most school curriculum schemes since he believes that courses which focus on social and political analysis should be the focal point of school curriculum. This is an interesting perspective, since curriculum decisions which impact the lives of students across the country are often being made by locally elected school boards through a social and highly politicized process.

College and Career Readiness

College and Career Readiness is the term commonly used by educational agencies to describe the curriculum framework which guides schools in their implementation of the Common Core Standards which are supposed to train students for entering the workforce as either college educated or skilled technical workers. The term CCR suggests a wide-reaching curriculum program, and this is evidenced by the unique state-level definitions of the framework which have been adopted by various states across the nation (Green, et al., 2021). Education researchers, however, use their own language to define CCR and the characteristics that are evidence of the curriculum framework being implemented. When CCR is implemented, it impacts graduation pathways, college preparatory and Career Technical courses, school curriculum offerings, and the provision of services by both internal and external personnel. In addition, CCR models often involve the creation or nurturing of school cultures which promote college bound ideologies for students.

31

Definition of CCR

One of the challenges of defining CCR is that different stakeholders articulate divergent viewpoints when discussing the framework depending on their positionality and their expectations for students in their communities. The American College Testing Association defines CCR as "the acquisition of the knowledge of skills a student needs to enroll in and succeed in credit-bearing first year courses at a postsecondary institution" (Green, et al., 2023, p. 222). This focus on postsecondary enrollment is laudable, but critics like Erika Anderson and former U.S. Secretary of Education Arne Duncan have lamented this exclusionary focus which appears to ignore technical careers which are also important for the economy and provide another pathway to individual financial security ("Cut to the Core," 2014). Conley (2010) suggests the problem might be semantic, and that substituting the word "postsecondary" for the word "college" helps to unify the definition of CCR because it now implies career training after high school graduation in preparation for a broad range of employment opportunities. A similar approach was adopted by Morningstar, et al. (2018, p. 1) since they suggest that the old focus on high school graduation is now inadequate for the modern economy and that students must now be prepared "not only to complete high school but to be prepared for postsecondary education and long-term careers." The National Association of Colleges and Employers (NACE) contributed to the dialogue by publishing a list of key competencies that they believed were representative of career readiness. These competencies included "critical thinking and problem-solving, oral and written communications, teamwork and collaboration, digital technology, leadership, professionalism and work ethic, career management, and global intercultural fluency" (Green, et al., 2021, p. 1).

Conley (2010) identifies four general elements of CCR as follows: content knowledge, key cognitive strategies, learning strategies, and transition knowledge and skills. Other researchers have expanded the required CCR core skills to include student motivation and engagement since these traits are vital for academic success (Morningstar, et al., 2018). Nagaoka, et al. (2013) went even further by adding the student dispositions of persistence, self-regulation, self-efficacy, and goal orientation to the previous CCR models to place more emphasis on individual efforts to promote academic success. All the definitions of CCR, whether college or career oriented, place a heavy emphasis on completing high school and being prepared for postsecondary studies or training. Therefore, CCR is clearly a curriculum framework which emphasizes academic performance in school as a means of being prepared for either college matriculation or technical training after graduation.

When most states in the United States adopted the Common Core Standards (CCS), in 2010, CCR became an integral part of the curriculum framework. While the CCS were largely focused on Math and Literacy skills, CCR included essential nonacademic skills which were seen as necessary by employers who argued that a skills gap was hurting American competitiveness in the global economy (Green et al., 2023). Trade groups, including the American Society for Training and Development, blamed the education system in the United States for a failure to properly educate workers who possessed the necessary technical, communication, leadership, and writing skills which appeared to be in short supply in the country. Weaver and Osterman (2017) disagreed with the claims that a pervasive skills gap in hiring was hurting American businesses and their studies showed that most manufacturers did not have difficulty hiring workers with the necessary skills for the jobs that had openings. Other researchers supported their work and instead blamed cultural shifts in employee behavior that led

to high rates of turnover, as well as reduced internal training by corporations (Cappelli, 2015). While CCR was a response to perceived shortcomings in the education system in the United States, it is not completely clear that there was really a problem in the first place.

CCR Measurement

One of the challenges in implementing CCR curriculum is knowing whether students are college and career ready as they progress through school. Gaertner and McClarty (2015, p. 20) argue that this is problematic since "few systems have been implemented to track children's progress" and "college-readiness information is typically conveyed late in a student's high-school career." They further point out that it is too late to change academic trajectories at the end of the junior year of high school, so the PSAT, SAT, and ACT scores that diagnose their CCR status are nearly worthless when they are provided. Royster et al. (2015) found that only 19% of college graduates in 2011 were academically prepared for postsecondary school, according to their ACT scores, and this was troubling since the college preparedness rates for N/A/L students was much lower than their White counterparts. This lack of agreed upon CCR measurement criteria highlights one of the challenges of CCR assessment since there is no clear consensus about which data is most indicative of CCR readiness. Green et al. (2023) noted that scores in mathematics and English/Language Arts are the primary measures of college and career ready proficiency despite research which has indicated that other factors also contribute to readiness such as high attendance rates, participation in dual enrollment programs, and taking a rigorous class schedule which includes Advanced Placement courses. Gutierrez-Ocampo (2020) suggests that one of the challenges for many Latinx students is the lack of access to ACT/SAT preparation programs which are often used by White students to improve their scores. Interestingly, research sponsored by ACT, Inc. found that score disparities between students of

color and Whites were largely a consequence of the quality of the schools they attended as opposed to other factors attributable to poverty and race (Royster et al., 2015). Unfortunately, due to the intersectionality of race and poverty in the United States, relying on standardized tests like the ACT to determine college readiness presents another potential educational barrier for minoritized students since they often end up in the lower performing schools because of the neighborhoods in which they are zoned (Castro, 2013).

Gaertner and McClarty (2015) suggest that measurements of CCR should be conducted in middle school using a middle-school index which does not rely solely on standardized test scores but includes additional data such as attendance, behavior, and course performance. The use of data other than test scores, like the ACT, would also reduce the implicit bias against Latinx and African American students who traditionally do not score well on standardized exams, but are denied equitable access to postsecondary programs based upon these CCR measurement tools (Castro, 2013). Royster et al. (2015, p. 209) make the point that "students who do not demonstrate readiness in 8th grade are less likely to become college ready by graduation" but their conclusions were based on data from *The Forgotten Middle* report generated by ACT, Inc., which was clearly promoting its ACT Explore and ACT Plan products. ACT, Inc. clearly supported early intervention in college readiness since the report emphasized the need to begin monitoring students at the end of their elementary schooling and throughout middle school, with a plea for policymakers to provide "the necessary resources to schools so that they can implement comprehensive monitoring systems and flexible intervention programs" (ACT Inc., 2008, p. 38). The ACT corporation's suggested role would be the provision of fee-based testing services, starting in 8th grade with ACT Explore, and continuing through the 10th grade with the ACT Plan assessment (ACT Inc., 2014). What is remarkable about this college readiness pitch is

that it completely ignores grades 5 through 7, and instead focuses on grades 8 through 10 with the capstone of the ACT Exam in grade 11 as a final assessment of a student's college readiness. While this college readiness plan is proscriptive, it is clearly aimed at generating a profit flow for ACT, Inc. while ignoring many aspects of college readiness which are not measurable by a standardized test.

CCR Graduation Pathways

When a student's college and career readiness is assessed, it can lead to placement practices which either affirm their CCR status by placing them in a rigorous academic track, or instead limit their academic options for the future through placement in a career pathway (Green et al., 2023). This can be problematic for N/A/L students since placement in a career pathway diverts them from the college bound cohorts and limits them to career options which are often not as rewarding as the wider range of possibilities available to students who attend college. Career Technical Education (CTE) courses have been used to provide career readiness for students on the career pathway, and there are many policymakers who have encouraged an expansion of CTE curriculum as an alternative to college readiness. Other education policymakers have promoted experiential curriculums which provide hands-on exposure to career fields for students, so that they have a better understanding of career options that are available when they enter the workforce. Proponents of enhanced college readiness initiatives point to advanced courses (AP and International Baccalaureate) and dual enrollment opportunities as curriculum pathways that have the potential to increase college preparedness for students (Conley, 2010). Latinx and African American students often do not have equal access to college readiness pathways because of gatekeeping practices that are driven by deficit

ideologies that school officials maintain with regards to minoritized student populations (Alvarado & An, 2015).

Tracking Practices

One of the challenges for equitable implementation of CCR frameworks is the persistence of tracking practices whereby minoritized students are diverted away from rigorous college ready curriculum, during secondary school, towards workforce pathways which are referred to as career ready (Welton & Martinez, 2014). Harris et al. (2020) have also documented the deficit lens through which the K-12 school systems view female African American students leading to obstacles that prevent equitable access to college and career planning resources. Other researchers including George Mwangi et al. (2017) have documented the gatekeeping practices which restrict college readiness training to students based upon their academic track. Thus, minority students who have been tracked into career or workforce pathways have a difficult time accessing college readiness information and this can trap them into accepting lower paying occupations when they leave high school.

Tracking practices also impact N/A/L students with regards to their access to the rigorous secondary school classes which provide the necessary college readiness that will later translate into successful completion of college programs (Tyson, 2011). This process often begins in middle schools when students of color are separated from many of their White counterparts who are placed in academically gifted (AG) programs which provide a more challenging learning experience. More important, however, is the role that these AG programs play in determining course placements when the students go on to high school and college readiness courses are most important (George Mwangi, 2018). Students who do not get placed in advanced academic tracks during middle school do not receive automatic placements in college preparatory curriculum

programs when they enroll in high school, and this means that the likelihood of exposure to a true college readiness curriculum is greatly reduced. While some N/A/L students successfully jump tracks during secondary school, the vast majority are "relegated to lower-level courses because they are not aware of the prerequisites to enroll in advanced placement courses" and they are victims of the gatekeepers who assist students of privilege in monopolizing access to rigorous classes (Welton & Martinez, 2014, p. 199). The pattern of tracking students of color in middle schools is particularly problematic since it is biased against N/A/L students who are denied access to rigorous courses at an early age, and this is used to later justify placement in career, as opposed to college, pathways as they continue their education in high school.

CTE Curriculum

One of the programs which has received attention due to the CCR curriculum framework is Career and Technical Education (CTE) which is the modern version of vocational education which historically provided a separate educational track for students who were not considered qualified for higher education (Fletcher, 2012). While CTE has been reconceived as both a separate and dual education (college preparatory and CTE) track it has been problematized because counselors are rostering large numbers of students in CTE classes and studies indicate that only "20% of CTE students decide to further their education subsequent to earning their high school diploma" (Fletcher, 2012, p. 101). Secondary school counselors have been scrutinized for their role in placing excessive numbers of N/A/L students in what appears to be a college-limiting track with lower earnings potential in the long run.

The subordinate CCR pathway is career readiness, as evidenced by the ongoing debate about the emphasis that many education policymakers have placed on college preparedness for all students (Hunter Quartz et al., 2019) and the neglect of career training programs ("Cut to the

Core," 2014). CTE programs have traditionally provided non-college bound students with a curriculum pathway to meaningful careers in technical fields spread across three domains which ranged from criminal justice and nursing to horticulture and manufacturing technology (Armstrong, et al., 2021). Broadly speaking CTE career fields include occupations which do not require a four-year college degree but are instead characterized by specialized training, certification, and community college coursework (Hyslop, 2006). One of the defining traits of CTE curriculum, which often begins in middle schools, is a focus on both hard (specialized training) and soft (work ethic, collaboration, communication, etc.) skills to increase career readiness for high school graduates (Bass et al., 2016). Community colleges have traditionally provided these skillsets which are in demand by businesses who are looking for new employees who have additional training and skills which supplement their high school diploma. Pham et al. (2020) also documented the real-life benefits enjoyed by community college students who pursued CTE curriculum pathways since they enjoyed higher wages, enhanced status, and better job security than their counterparts who did not attend college. What was most striking about their research was that these workplace benefits were accrued by CTE students independent of their graduation from their community college program.

While much of the focus on CTE curriculum has been centered around the technical skills needs of employers, the academic aspects have largely been ignored. Green et al. (2023) discussed their concerns that only 17% of adults believed that high school graduates were "prepared for the workplace" (p. 3). Students who do not enroll in post-secondary schooling clearly face a challenge when looking for employment since many employers, and the public, believe that they have a skills gap which is detrimental to their occupational productivity. Some researchers argue that this skills gap can be remediated by integrating more Math, English

Language Arts, and Science exposure in the CTE curriculum (Park et al., 2017). Wu-Rorrer (2017) promotes the inclusion of Science, Technology, Engineering and Math (STEM) concepts in the CTE curriculum to increase the engagement of students in secondary schools while bolstering the academic benefits for enhanced CCR. He further argues that this strategy will help to dissuade policymakers from making cuts in CTE funding because of the narrow CCR focus on core academic subjects like Math and Science. Strengthening the academic core of secondary school CTE programs will also help to minimize the stigma of the workforce-oriented curriculum which has often been criticized as a simple rebranding of the old "vocational educational" model (Venkatraman & Kaspi, 2018). In the postsecondary setting, CTE courses have primarily been offered by community colleges and they are currently trying to increase enrollment by offering online classes which provide the same skills which are desired by employers (Garza Mitchell, 2017). As they make this transition to offering more online CTE courses, community colleges are finding it difficult to provide the hands-on experiential experiences that are typical for the curriculum. CTE curriculum, whether in secondary schools or community colleges, has become an essential vehicle for providing the career readiness component of CCR training for students who do not attend four-year colleges.

College Readiness Curriculum

College readiness is arguably the most prominent feature of CCR since it generally receives the most attention and resources as schools attempt to prepare students for postsecondary academic studies (Armstrong, et al., 2021; "Cut to the Core," 2014). Effective college readiness frameworks include rigorous academic courses, dual enrollment programs, college bound culture, effective secondary school counselors, parental involvement, after-school programs, and external agents who provide crucial support for minoritized students who aspire to

attend college after graduating from high school. While the presence of all of these factors is important for implementing a comprehensive college readiness model, the individual elements must also be studied to gain a deeper understanding of their impact on CCR.

Dual enrollment programs allow students to begin taking college-level courses while they are still in high school and many of them provide students with an associate degree upon graduation (Hyslop, 2006). Another common dual enrollment model is the Early College High School (ECHS) program which allows high school students to take courses on the campus of a community college or four-year college while they are still in high school (Hooker & Brand, 2010). One of the advantages of this framework is that it provides students with both "college knowledge" and a "college-going identity" while also providing valuable college credits which can be transferred when students enter college after graduation (Hooker & Brand, 2010, p. 77). Conley (2010) also stresses the importance of "college knowledge" as a key component in effective CCR curriculum because first generation college students often "lack awareness of the implicit, often unstated knowledge about how college really operates" (p. 72). Research by Alvarado and An (2015) suggests that dual enrollment programs primarily benefit White students, in terms of CCR, and they speculate that this may be due to a lack of information being received by minoritized students when they are entering high school.

Dual enrollment and early college programs offer college-level coursework for students who are still in high school but there are also other curriculum models which can prepare students for college using rigorous and challenging courses. International Baccalaureate (IB) and Advanced Placement (AP) courses are specifically intended to provide college readiness by exposing students to college-level studies (Gutierrez-Ocampo, 2020). AP courses are different from IB courses in that they also provide students with the opportunity to earn college credit

41

while still in high school, and they are generally not offered to students until the ninth or tenth grade (Conley, 2010). Alvarado and An (2015) also noted that Latinx and African American high school students gained a boost in their grade point averages, due to AP course weighting, as well as improved college acceptance rates because admissions counselors saw the courses as a signal that these students were "seriously committed to their studies" (p. 164). While many researchers argue that a rigorous high school curriculum which includes AP and IB courses can improve college readiness, there are critics who argue that high school intervention is too late (ACT Inc., 2008) because academic trajectories are already being locked in by the end of eighth grade. If this is indeed true, education policymakers will need to consider expansion of IB style academic programs, which can begin at a much earlier grade level, to improve college readiness for all students.

Another important facet of college readiness, which has clear implications for schools which are trying to promote CCR, is college-bound culture which can be vital for influencing the aspirations and academic practices of Latinx and African American secondary school students (Hooker & Brand, 2010). Mwangi et al. (2018) argue that this "is particularly important to low-income and first-generation students who may predominantly depend on their schools as a form of social capital and as a resource in college preparation (p. 555). College-bound culture is comprehensive and involves the attitudes and dispositions of teachers, administrators, staff, students, and other school stakeholders as well as access to true college preparatory courses throughout the entire secondary school experience (Royster et al., 2015). Secondary school students' aspirations are often linked to their parental levels of education, but this was less of a factor in individual college readiness than equitable access to rigorous courses and counselor driven "classroom guidance programs designed to enhance…career and college readiness self-

efficacy" (Martinez et al., 2017, p. 186). When college bound culture dominates student life, in a secondary school setting, the chances of minoritized students being influenced by their college-bound friends is increased and this can translate into "advanced course-taking behavior in high school" which is a key factor in college readiness (Alvarado & An, 2015).

Secondary schools with college bound cultures also promote parental involvement due to its impact on developing college-going cultural capital in minoritized students (Mwangi et al., 2018). This often means the creation of family partnerships which help parents acknowledge and appreciate the abilities of their students so that they are more likely to encourage them to aspire towards attending college despite the impact that increased engagement in academic activities might have upon their familial obligations (Alvarado & An, 2015). Arriero and Griffin (2019) also affirmed the importance of school counselors developing "meaningful relationships with parents" to "meet them on their terms, and find out what their needs are" (p. 8). They further suggested the use of community asset mapping to identify the talents and resources within minoritized communities which can be used to provide additional academic and social support which nurtures the college bound culture within a school (Arriero & Griffin, 2019). Research by Royster et al. (2015) has also documented the impact that parents had upon their student's likelihood of completing college, but this study focused on the educational attainment of the parents without directly measuring the correlation that this might have with their involvement in the schools attended by their students.

In order to create a more vibrant college-bound culture, many schools have created after-school programs, following the Citizen Schools model, which engage external agents who work to increase the social capital necessary to nurture college-going aspirations for minoritized middle school students (Hooker & Brand, 2010). These extracurricular programs, and others like

GEAR UP, TRIO, and Talent Search, aim to create a college-going identity before students even enroll in high school through the intervention of mentors who helped provide minoritized students with "early exposure to college-going conversations" (Royster et al., 2015, p. 210). When these extracurricular programs also engage students' parents, they are often more successful because many families have already made their decisions about the feasibility of college before their students even enroll in high school (Hooker & Brand, 2010).

CCR Challenges for African American and Latinx Students

While the CCR curriculum objectives might appear to be beneficial for minoritized secondary school students, a closer analysis shows that there are many troublesome obstacles which prevent them from realizing the same benefits as their White school counterparts. These obstacles include gatekeeping practices which are fueled by deficit ideologies about minoritized students, the shortage and lack of efficacy of secondary school counselors, the impacts of stress, and the challenges of implementing CCR programs in conjunction with Multi-Tiered Systems of Support (MTSS) and Special Education programs. The wide array of potential roadblocks, which prevent minoritized students from gaining equitable access to the potential benefits of CCR, is problematic because they highlight the race-neutral educational practices which are prevalent in the United States. African American, Native American, and Latinx secondary school students face both implicit and explicit barriers to CCR which have a detrimental impact on their working lives in the long run.

One of the documented challenges that minoritized students face in secondary school is the problem of gatekeepers preventing them from having equitable access to the meaningful components of CCR due to deficit ideologies which blame the students and their cultures for their lack of academic success (Castro, 2013; Zamudio, et al., 2010). The deficit driven

perceptions of the abilities of minoritized students were often curriculum specific and impacted not only how developmental reading and CTE instructors viewed their students, but also created the contradictory situation whereby the teachers "expected students to come in highly literate, but assumed they would be aliterate by choice" (Armstrong et al., 2021, p. 147). Harris et al. (2020) also documented the "presence of negative expectations or bias in the educational system" which was a key factor impacting CCR for African American girls whose behaviors "do not align with traditional, White standards of femininity" (p. 43). These deficit viewpoints, regarding the capabilities of N/A/L secondary school students served to foster a narrative which resulted in denial of access to college readiness programs as they progressed through their K-12 schooling (Castro, 2013). Secondary school counselors often contributed to this problem, either because they possessed deficit ideologies regarding students of color, or because they lacked the training necessary to adequately provide CCR support for traditionally under-served students (Parikh-Foxx et al., 2019).

When researchers studied the efficacy of secondary school counselors, with regards to providing CCR services for minoritized students, they were concerned that this was an area that was contributing to the inequitable CCR outcomes that have been widely documented (Harris et al., 2020). In addition to deficit ideologies, secondary school counselors are often overworked, and this appeared to exacerbate the problem of effective CCR counseling for students of color who are in need of tailored intervention programs (Martinez et al., 2017). Harris et al. found that counselors at "schools with fewer resources and a low college-going culture…have less time for personalized CCR conversations and are stretched thin across other responsibilities and are thus less available to students" (p. 44). This situation has been further exacerbated for Latinx and African American students due to nationwide school budget cuts which have often decreased the

number of school counselors who can provide CCR resources for English as a second language (ESL) students while reaching ratios of as much as 350 students per counselor in secondary schools (Brown, 1992).

CCR implementation is also adversely impacted by the impact that stress has on many students of color in urban environments. Johnson et al. (2015) have connected the stresses associated with poverty and urban violence to decreased academic success and a consequent decrease in career readiness when minoritized students graduate from high school. Morningstar et al. (2018) supported this assertion with their findings which illustrated the need for higher levels of CCR intervention for students who were classified in the higher tiers (Tiers II and III) of secondary school multitiered systems of support. These higher tiers are indicative of behavioral and learning challenges which require both support, close monitoring, and high levels of specialized intervention. Morningstar et al. (2018) also note the need for integrating CCR with MTSS programs to provide additional support for secondary school students who have disabilities to ensure that they are not falling through the cracks in terms of post-secondary school readiness. Minoritized students are often identified for MTSS services because of their low socioeconomic status (SES) so the integration of CCR curriculum with MTSS programming is essential for providing readiness to N/A/L students (Fletcher et al., 2018).

CCR as Education Policy

The real problem with the CCR accountability model is that the model does not hold itself accountable, does not attempt to measure college matriculation rates, and is an unfunded mandate which only pays for testing (the diagnosis), since it uses a "'pull yourselves up by your own bootstraps' mentality" for the cure (Leonardo, 2007, p. 271). If the Race to the Top and ESSA legislation really intended to prepare students for college and career they would use linear

studies to measure the outcomes for college enrollment, college graduation, and career

placements which are inclusive of students who do not attend college after high school. Instead,

the accountability regimes measure annual test data without linking the measured results to

college and career readiness outcomes which would provide real data about the effectiveness of

the SBA models. Leonardo's claim that "Students are objects of the division of labor...[and]

they learn that their ultimate destiny is 'to get a job'" is supported by the objectives of CCR

which show no concern for the kind of job that students get (2003, p. 510). Carrying this logic

further, CCR accountability means that the model is indifferent about the plight of N/A/L

students as long as they have employment which serves corporate interests.

The problematic nature of CCR is on ready display in the state of North Carolina since

legislators have implemented the accountability regime which holds students, teachers, schools,

and districts accountable for test-measurable growth, while simultaneously subverting the

college plans of N/A/L youth. In the case of African American and Latinx students, the

accountability regimes (NCLB, ESSA, Common Core Standards) only served the purpose of

resegregating schools and concentrating poverty (Leonardo, 2007). Worse yet, North Carolina

lawmakers intentionally sabotaged the "college readiness" provisions of CCR when they banned

undocumented students from attending the state's community college system after a 2005 bill to

provide in-state tuition benefits was defeated in the General Assembly (Sanders, 2010). This

roadblock to widespread Latinx college enrollment in North Carolina was tragic because

"Community colleges serve the needs of diverse constituents and are viewed as gateways for

those who otherwise would not have access to higher education" (Oseguera et al., 2010, p.

38). Conchas (2016, p. ix) disagrees with this emphasis on community college access for Latinx

students since research indicates that it is terminal in nature because "only 14% of Latinos who

enroll in a community college will transfer to a 4-year university, and most will leave without a

certificate or degree." In addition, undocumented students in North Carolina were paying the

non-resident rate of tuition for both the university and community college systems, and both

differentials were already acting as a "significant barrier to higher education for these students

(Sanders, 2010, p. 110). Blocking access to higher education for Latinx students contributes to

poverty in their community since the "Latino population is much more likely than other racial

and ethnic groups to be concentrated in low-skilled occupations" and lack of access to higher

education is clearly a factor (Flores & Southern, 2010, p. 24). Furthermore, it is a difficult

proposition to convince undocumented students that dropping out of school is a bad idea when

they know that working a low-paying job is their only option after they receive their high school

diploma.

While much of the literature regarding access to higher education was centered around

the experiences of Latinx students, there has been a similar conservative assault on Historically

Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs). Conservative legislators argue that funding HBCUs

is both wasteful and unnecessary since the desegregation of historically White state universities

means that higher education opportunities are available for students of color (Schexnider,

2013). This belief is misguided because it conveniently overlooks the competition to gain

admittance to the more desirable UNC campuses, and the fact that graduation rates for minorities

are higher at HBCUs largely because of the support systems that they provide. There is a

convergence between N/A/L students with regards to HBCUs since many Latinx students who

attend 4-year colleges apply to them as part of their admissions portfolio, and North Carolina's

UNC-Pembroke campus provides support for both Native American and African American

students. Decreasing HBCU funding would negatively impact the aspirations of several diverse minority populations for achieving their higher education goals.

Education policy, with regards to fulfilling the mantra of CCR must include discussions about the quality of education received by minoritized students as well as the access to college counseling which is necessary for a smooth admissions process. Acevedo-Gil (2016) has documented the challenges faced by Latinx youth when their high school counselors did not provide adequate assistance because they deemed them unworthy of their efforts due to racialized beliefs about their probability of success in college. The problem was further compounded when counselors that she interviewed suggested that their resources were best used for students who were planning to attend 4-year colleges as opposed to community college pathways. African American students have also expressed similar dissatisfaction with their counselors since they considered them an obstacle when they applied to college (Bonner & Murry, 2012). Research by D'Amico et al. (2017) has confirmed the overrepresentation of Latinx students in the community college system, but they argue that this is a function of the broader level of support services which are provided by community colleges that are not available in the 4-year universities. Since community college tuition is more affordable than the tuition for the university system, for both resident and out-of-state tuition classifications, it is likely that the intersection of poverty and race provides an explanation for this enrollment dynamic.

Graduation Rates of Minoritized Students

Researchers have documented the low graduation rates for N/A/L high school students (Martinez et al., 2017; Arriero & Griffin, 2019) and this clearly contributes to the problem of low CCR effectiveness since these students are unlikely to pursue postsecondary educations and they

face skills-based discrimination in the workplace. Gaertner and Larsen McClarty (2015) suggest that better CCR indicators should be utilized, to predict success after high school, since dropout rates highlight shortcomings and individual failures but do not provide useful information about how these students are likely to perform in either their colleges or careers. Despite this critique, high school completion rates can provide useful information about readiness since the primary objectives of CCR cannot be achieved when 65% of N/A/L students are not completing their secondary educations (Heckman & LaFontaine, 2010).

The data regarding graduation rates of N/A/L students is complicated by the fact that No Child Left Behind legislation left the measurement to individual states (Hoogeveen, 2009). The NCLB legislation also prompted educators and policymakers to manipulate their graduation rate data, and for this reason it is difficult to find reliable statistics (Davis, 2018). Perlstein (2004) suggests the use of a cumulative promotion index (CPI) which would allow data from individual states to be compared against one another in a reliable fashion. In the case of Maryland, state officials were applauding a state high school graduation rate of 85% for all students, and a 75% rate for Latinx and African Americans (Perlstein, 2004), but use of the CPI indicated that this subgroup had a graduation rate of only 50%. Brown (2015) expressed optimism about national graduation rates by citing an 81% national graduation rate in 2013, with the graduation gap rate for Latinx and African American students narrowing in 28 states. While this might seem like progress, the questionable methods used to measure state graduation rates, coupled with the fact that 22 of the 50 states did not show shrinking graduation rate gaps, suggests that much work still needs to be done.

50

Higher Education Data for African American and Latinx Students

While the high school graduation rate data for minoritized students is discouraging, the CCR narrative becomes even more concerning when reviewing college graduation rates. Gaertner and Larsen McClarty (2015) express frustration that the stated intention of CCR programs is college readiness, but the primary measurements (high school graduation rates and SAT/ACT scores) do not correlate to college success since 60% of high school graduates who enter community colleges "need remediation before they are ready for college-level work" (p. 21). Sparks and Malkus (2013) have discovered a similar pattern of remediation in four-year colleges and universities where 20% of enrolled freshmen take developmental education courses in order to be adequately prepared for their program of study. Royster et al. (2015) have focused on the college enrollment and attainment gap, as a better measure of CCR, since improving matriculation rates for students of color is meaningless if their college graduation rates remain stagnant.

The challenge of equitable CCR accountability becomes apparent when viewing college graduation data which shows that only 18% of N/A/L students completed their undergraduate programs in six years (Hirschman, 2016). The data is even more troublesome for college students who are in the bottom income quartile, and did not have a college-graduate parent, since their college graduation rate was only 9% (Bowen et al., 2009). Students of color who began their post-secondary educations in the community college system did not fare much better since only 10.2% of them graduated from a four-year college in six years (Mooring & Mooring, 2016). These statistics were especially frustrating since White students enjoyed a significantly higher rate of graduation from four-year colleges, than their minoritized counterparts, indicating an additional educational disparity for N/A/L students who attempted to use the community college

system as a bridge to four-year universities (Hirschman, 2016). Royster et al. (2015) also notes that while the college enrollment gap between African American and White students has been decreasing slowly over time, the gap between White and Latinx high school graduates is not shrinking. Kanno and Harklau (2012) found that English as a Second Language students, who were largely Latinx, comprised 21% of all K-12 students in the United States but accounted for only 11% of total college enrollments. This data trend suggests that policies for improving college enrollment rates must be tailored to the target populations to effectively increase the participation of N/A/L students in postsecondary schooling opportunities.

Minoritized Students and Career Opportunities

One of the questions of concern for Latinx, Native American, and African American high school graduates is the issue of equitable access to meaningful career opportunities with or without the completion of a postsecondary education. Thus, CCR frameworks should be providing access to better employment opportunities whether students-of-color attend college or not, and especially if they complete a college degree. Many of the more lucrative careers are in the Information Technology (IT) or STEM disciplines which are dominated by White males (Olson & Fagen, 2007). This underrepresentation of minoritized high school graduates in fields like engineering means that while African Americans were 12.3% of the population in the United States in the year 2012, they only held 3.6% of all engineering jobs (Aspray, 2016). Burke and Mattis (2007) argue that the "association between white males and power of the IT revolution has served to block access to those who are different due to gender and race" (p. 72). Olson and Fagen (2007) support this contention by noting that African Americans comprise only 4% of all PhDs in the country while Latinx graduates only hold 3% of the nation's PhDs despite a population contribution of 14%. This pattern is replicated in the chemicals industries where

African American and Latinx professionals represent only 6.2% of all registered American Chemical Society members (Wu et al., 2014). In a modern technology driven society, underrepresentation in the STEM fields means diminished earnings opportunities and decreased job security.

One of the major obstacles that prevents N/A/L high school graduates from working in the STEM disciplines is the existence of barriers which "selectively provide or withhold opportunity" due to race or ethnicity (Olson & Hagen, 2017). African American and Latinx high school seniors have the same aspirations for STEM careers as their White counterparts, but they are less likely to complete a major in a STEM discipline while in college (U.S. Commission on Civil Rights, 2010). Hilton and Gray (2017) have documented the higher graduation rates experienced by African Americans attending Historically Black Colleges and Universities despite their original purpose of providing an education for African American students who wanted to attend college during the era of segregation. Aspray (2016) argues that the lack of Hispanic Serving Institutions (HSIs) has led many Latinx students to pursue their educations at HBCUs since they find the environment more nurturing and culturally sympathetic. The U.S. Commission on Civil Rights (2010) has suggested that there are fewer N/A/L physicians, scientists, and engineers in the present than there would have been if universities had not actively recruited minority students with lower credentials in an attempt to diversify their student bodies. While this policy statement is clearly problematic, it addresses both the issue of the real impact of CCR curriculum on minoritized students, and the racially hostile environments that often exist in more competitive academic institutions (Byrd, 2017). Minoritized students are often poorly prepared for challenging STEM educations, and this means that they are not able to access the best jobs and career opportunities that exist in a modern economy.

53

Space and Place

The study of schools necessarily becomes a study of space and place because they are geographically situated, and they represent a convergence point for social activity and exchange. In this regard they conform to Soja's paradigm where "Spaciality is socially produced, and like society itself, exists in both substantial forms (concrete spatialities) and as a set of relations between individuals and groups" (1989, p. 120). Warf and Arias (2009, p. 1) suggest that "*where* things happen is critical to knowing *how* and *why* they happen" and this means that the physical space (*where)* can be captured by images like photographs, but the social interactions must be elicited from interviews and narratives to understand the *how* and *why*. These views about space are consistent with the scholarship of early spatial theorists like Schaefer and Ullman who believed that "geography should focus on spatial interaction" because *place* gains importance only because of what is happening in that space (Harvey & Holly, 1981, p. 29). Dahms (2009, p. 97) suggests that space can be conceived "as the intersection between underlying forces and surface appearances" which are represented by the social dynamics and interactions which occur within the physical school buildings.

Social justice is an important theme for spatial theorists who were inspired by the work of Foucault who would argue that schools should be held accountable for the role they play in fostering "political violence" upon the population while maintaining "neutral and independent facades" (Soja, 1989, p. 63). Soja was concerned about the impact that space had upon societal issues of racism, class, and gender, and he felt that these issues were largely being ignored (Queiros, 2016). Both Soja and Lefebvre argue that modern capitalism requires the domination of both time and space and that socially produced spaces (like schools) help to reproduce the means of production and grow capitalist industry (Soja, 1989; Lefebvre, 1991). Schools are

further implicated for their role in oppression because Foucault suggests that their architectural design is used to facilitate oversight in institutional settings (Flynn, 2007). For this reason, Huxley (2007, p. 192) describes "substantive geographies of government" which are part of the spatial apparatus of government regulation of specific individuals and groups. Crampton and Elden (2007, p. 2) suggest that "space is a vital part of the battle for control and surveillance of individuals" while it can also provide "a medium through which change could be effected" (Thrift, 2007, p. 55). Dikec (2001) expresses the same concerns about the injustice that is built into the spatiality of oppressed people, but like Soja (2009, 2010) he argues that spacial justice can be achieved through social action. Thus, spatial perspectives provide a critique of modern institutions for their role in using space to maintain inequitable regimes, while also providing "an intellectual space for radically conceptualizing new possibilities of thought and action" (Bloch & Brasdefer, 2023, p. 239).

Limitations of Current CCR Studies

The existing scholarship regarding CCR curriculum frameworks has been useful for defining the origin, purpose, and widespread discrimination in secondary schools across the United States. Academic literature also provides a foundation for better understanding the problems of diversity-neutral educational policies which purportedly treat all students in an equal fashion without regard for gender, race, ethnicity, or religious orientation. There has not, however, been extensive literature published regarding the experiences of Native American, Latinx, and African American secondary school students in North Carolina who have studied under the CCR curriculum framework with the promise of better career opportunities in the future. This research project will attempt to fill this void by directly studying experiences that N/A/L students have had with CCR instruction in North Carolina. This study also seeks to

critique the CCR framework, with regards to its impact on the lives of specific minoritized youth

in North Carolina, with the goal of providing an opportunity for educational reform.

CHAPTER III: METHODOLOGY

In order to better understand how North Carolina's College and Career Readiness (CCR) curriculum framework impacts African American, Latinx, and Native American youth, data was collected to document and analyze the perceptions of minoritized youth, and whether or not they believed that the curriculum improved their lives. The research project was undertaken using Arts Based Research as the methodology and Critical Race Theory as the theoretical framework. Storytelling and photography were utilized as the main pillars for the collection of raw data for this project. Individual interviews, focus group discussions, documents, and photographic artifacts provided the data for the project, while the guiding framework through which the data was analyzed was Critical Race Theory (CRT). The use of a CRT framework was essential for this research project because N/A/L students are minoritized subgroups of the broader student population in North Carolina. Consequently, it is possible that institutionalized racism is impacting how CCR curriculum affects the lives of these secondary school students as they pursue higher education, and/or careers as adults in North Carolina and elsewhere.

Pilot Study

During the Fall semester of 2021 I conducted a pilot study of this research project to complete the assignments for the Introduction to Qualitative Inquiry course in which I was enrolled. The course subtitle emphasized a Social Justice Approach, and this meant that the course would provide a nurturing environment for the critical theory lens that I wanted to adopt as I completed the requirements for my dissertation. The course provided exposure to different qualitative methodologies and required the use of various data gathering techniques including individual research participant interviews and field observations. After data was collected, transcripts were completed, and coding techniques were used to generate common themes and

identify patterns so that the raw data could be analyzed for the final project paper. The pilot study that was completed allowed me to vet the qualitative research process, which was used for this dissertation, and provided practical experience which was useful for dealing with some of the challenges which were encountered during the research project.

The pilot study was extremely useful since it provided experience with soliciting participants, conducting interviews, recording observations, and transcribing data. More importantly, however, was the validation of the research project's underlying premise that curriculum mandates are potentially impacting minoritized secondary school students in an adverse fashion which neither promotes college enrollment or meaningful adult careers. If relatively privileged research participants had experiences which they felt limited their educational and career opportunities, there are clearly narratives which might provide even more illumination regarding the discriminatory nature of North Carolina's CCR framework. One of the participants said that she appreciated the opportunity to talk about her experiences because she felt that she was denied the opportunity to attend the university of her choice, despite being accepted, because her high school's staff was indifferent about her personal success. These experiences with the pilot study have helped to validate the proposed research project because they uncovered the existence of discriminatory practices in secondary education, under the veil of CCR implementation, and highlighted the need for minoritized students to have a forum for articulating their experiences. According to Kilbourn (2006, p. 540) the chronicled experiences that African American, Native American, and Latinx students in North Carolina have had with curriculum frameworks are worthy of educational research because it "is clearly an educational problem (a phenomenon to be understood)" but also "a problem that might well merit systematic, sustained research." The pilot study also uncovered a strong desire for reforming curriculum

practices on the part of two of the study participants who expressed a desire to work with minoritized scholars to improve their access to higher education, and consequently more meaningful careers.

Data Needed for Study

To successfully answer the research questions and determine how Native American, African American, and Latinx students' lives are being impacted by North Carolina curriculum mandates, qualitative data was collected from numerous sources for rigorous analysis. These data sources include individual narratives created during interviews, demographic information from the participants, focus group conversations, North Carolina CCR documents, school mission, vision, and purpose statements, and photographs of the secondary schools where the participants studied. Participants were solicited for engagement in the project, interviews were scheduled, websites were browsed, and secondary school communities were visited to take photographs which helped contextualize the participants' narratives. After the original data set from the first- round of interviews was analyzed, additional questions were written to use during second-round interviews, to clarify areas of uncertainty, and provoke engaged conversations during the focus group meetings.

Research Questions

1) How have North Carolina's Native American, African American, and Latinx students been impacted by the state's College and Career Readiness (CCR) curriculum framework?

Sub-Questions:

a) How do N/A/L students perceive the state's CCR curriculum in terms of their educational and career experiences?

b) How are North Carolina CCR curriculum standards reinforced or supported by the experiences of N/A/L students?

Critical Race Theory

One of the underlying methodological frameworks for this research project is Critical Race Theory because the primary focus is the impact of North Carolina CCR curriculum on the lives of three identifiable minoritized subgroups. There is a societal tendency towards conflating race and ethnicity and the federal government of the United States jumbles the two demographics together creating a six-category scheme of racial and ethnic identification for all residents (Racial and Ethnic Categories, 2015). In this scheme "Black or African American" and "Hispanic or Latino" are two of the six racial/ethnic categories which also include "White," "Asian," Hawaiian/Pacific Islander, and Alaskan/Native American. While this classification scheme is problematic, it provides a useful reference point since this research project will be focused on the experiences of Native American, African American, and Latinx individuals who received secondary school instruction in North Carolina. While the point may seem to be trivial, it is important to align the participants with a commonly accepted classification schema. The fact that the federal government distinctly identifies N/A/L populations using race and ethnicity provides validity for the use of a critical race methodology in this project.

Critical race theory is vital to understanding the experiences of Latinx and African American students because of the history of oppression that both groups have endured, and continue to face, in both North Carolina and the United States as a whole. Solórzano and Yosso (2002) argue that a critical race methodology:

(a) foregrounds race and racism in all aspects of the research process… (b) challenges the traditional paradigms, texts, and theories used to explain the experiences of students of

60

color; (c) offers a liberatory or transformative solution to racial, gender, and class subordination; and (d) focuses on the racialized, gendered, and classed experiences of students of color. (p. 24)

Thus, the research project will look for evidence that N/A/L students in North Carolina have identifiable CCR curriculum experiences which have long-term impacts on their lives. Critical race theory also suggests that racism is systemic in society, and this means that institutions will often act in a biased fashion which manifests itself in discriminatory practices against minoritized groups. Bonilla-Silva (2018) argues that racist practices are being carried out openly against minoritized groups due to the new form of racism which uses race-neutral institutional and federal policies which are supposedly applied equally to all individuals without regard for their racial status. School curriculum practices must be rigorously scrutinized, because of the persistence of policies which appear to be non-discriminatory on the surface while potentially oppressing vulnerable groups in a covert fashion. Studying the secondary education experiences of N/A/L students, using a critical race framework, should provide a means of illuminating discriminatory educational practices if they are occurring under the guise of CCR curriculum delivery.

Federal education guidelines, crafted under the Bush and Obama administrations have contributed to the race-neutral approach to education policy by emphasizing "equality of educational opportunity" whereby "every student in a state would be taught the same curriculum and tested with the same standardized tests" (Spring, 2018, p. 505). This one-size-fits all approach can be discriminatory because school report card grades are largely based on standardized testing results and Latinx students who are English Language Learners do not receive waivers to exempt their scores from the accountability model. This is problematic in

terms of higher education opportunities since high schools with poor school report card grades are also burdened by non-competitive school profile ratings which then impact the higher education opportunities for their graduates. Thus, a strong student from a negatively labeled school has diminished enrollment prospects because of the lack of access to rigorous advanced courses (Advanced Placement, International Baccalaureate, etc.) which would improve the competitiveness of their academic resume, as well as the handicap of a lower school profile rating by the College Board. This handicap exists because students from schools with lower profile scores do not have equal access to more competitive four-year universities during the admissions process. Unfortunately, these racially discriminatory educational practices are persistent in secondary education because CCR curriculum practices, which include standardized curriculum and high stakes testing, are being applied "equally" to all schools and all students across the state. This practice disadvantages students for whom English is not a first language, as well as students who do not have the same household resources. The net impact is legally justifiable discriminatory CCR practices which could potentially lead to diminished career and college opportunities for N/A/L students in North Carolina.

Methodology

Due to the intensely personal nature of this research project, which will rely on the narratives of Native American, African American and Latinx adults, a qualitative research approach will be utilized. Instead of focusing on quantitative data, such as statistics and demographic information, qualitative data will be gathered and analyzed to gain a better understanding of the impact that North Carolina's CCR curriculum is having on minoritized youth. Lapan, et al. (2012) suggest that while a qualitative research framework might not provide a clear cause and effect relationship, it is important because it provides meaning for the

individuals participating in the research. This is an important distinction because the voices of minoritized individuals can provide a wealth of information about the impact that CCR curriculum has had upon their individual lives. While a quantitative study might be able to provide data regarding the number or percentage of minoritized youth entering colleges, dropping out, or engaging in meaningful careers, this data cannot explain "how" or "why" their adult lives followed the unique trajectories that brought them to the present. Only the impacted individuals can provide the contextual information which gives meaning to the statistical trends or situational outcomes. Schram (2006) argues that qualitative research methods will not provide definitive answers and closure, but rather a "critical awareness and understanding of problems" (p. 7). This critical awareness is vital for a research project which hopes to provide a platform for young adults, who may have been marginalized by North Carolina CCR curriculum practices, to articulate and recognize the experiences which have impacted their current lives. The eleven participants provided a substantial data set for gaining a deeper understanding about how the lives of N/A/L students have been influenced by CCR, especially since multiple interviews were conducted with over half of the study participants (see Table 1.).

Art-Based Research

Qualitative research methodologies can be exciting for a researcher since they provide the opportunity to exercise wide discretion when gathering data. I have a significant interest in 35mm black and white photography, and I used to have a darkroom set up in my house for developing film and processing prints. This prior experience, with this unique artistic medium, was utilized to visually capture the nuances of the physical settings where the study participants studied while completing their secondary schooling. This artistic methodology allowed me to better understand and contextualize the narratives of the research project participants by

63

capturing photographs of their secondary schools to document the "places" where the narratives occurred. There is a three-fold purpose behind this form of research inquiry; 1) It will allow the researcher to see some of the physical sites associated with the narratives that the participants related during their interviews, 2) It will provide opportunities for visual triangulation of the narratives of the participants, and 3) It will allow the researcher to make observations of the diverse local communities where the research participants received their secondary educations and encountered the CCR curriculum. This process is immersive and will necessarily bring the researcher to a closer understanding of the lived experiences of the participants. McNiff (2008, p. 29) defines Art-Based Research (ABR) as the "systematic use of the artistic process, the actual making of artistic expressions in all of the different forms of the arts, as a primary way of understanding and examining experience by both researchers and the people that they involve in their studies." Weber (2008) suggests that either the research participants, or the researcher, can create original images that relate to the phenomena being studied, and these images can be used to elicit or provoke additional data for the research project. Since one of the research goals is to better understand the lived experiences of the study participants, any method of inquiry which brings the researcher closer to their lives has value for the project. Creating a portfolio of school photographs provided another data set for analysis, which was then used to better contextualize the experiences of minoritized students as they experienced the delivery of CCR curriculum in different communities and physical spaces. Cole and Knowles (2008) also support this process of expanding the tools of research communication so that a broader audience, outside the confines of the academy, might be better engaged.

Researcher-Generated Photography

The use of photography as a medium for this ABR project was strategic since it is an artistic medium with which I was already familiar, and it provided additional data for the researcher, the participants, and the audience. Tinkler (2014) argues that photographs allow the viewers to make sense of the image in contextual fashion, which is influenced by the experiences and discourses which are unique to everyone. She further notes that photographs also help capture the "feel" of places while permanently documenting the features of physical locations, cultural practices, and people. Holm (2014) supports the use of researcher generated photographs, because the researcher can set the tone for future interviews by capturing the specific pictorial elements necessary to guide future discussions with the research participants. While this project will not involve photographing individuals, the contexts that the pictures provided for both the researcher and the audience were useful for facilitating second-round interviews.

The use of an ABR methodology, which employs the use of photography, provides for the collection and analysis of visual data as suggested by Ball and Smith (2020, p. 5) when they described ethnomethodology (EM) which "is more attentive to the contextual particulars of talk and action as a source of the understandings and orientations that guide participants' actions." The use of photographs as an original source of data, as well as a catalyst for mining new qualitative data, is consistent with this methodology since one of the goals is to curate pictures which are focused on the "looks of things" which might reveal incongruities which help substantiate the data from the interviews (Ball & Smith, 2020, p. 8). This process was part of an intentional feedback loop whereby the names of places and things generated from the first-round interviews were then photographed for creation and analysis by the researcher. The final step in

65

the loop was using the photographs to generate more conversational data from the participants during second-round interviews.

During the second-round interviews, the photographs were used as centerpieces to guide the conversations and elicit additional memories and narratives on the parts of the participants. The second-round interviews were characterized by deeper questions, which were distilled from both the transcripts from the first-round interviews, as well as the photographs themselves. Open-ended responses were also induced by asking what memories came to mind when looking at particular places which were presented in the photographs, and how they are linked to the experiences that the participants had with CCR curriculum during their secondary school experience.

Photographic Research

After each participant was interviewed the first time, photographs were taken to provide visual imagery of the schools where they received their secondary schooling and were exposed to North Carolina's CCR curriculum. These photographs were taken using a 35mm camera and black-and-white film since Berger (1992) makes a strong case for the effectiveness of this narrow artistic medium for eliciting responses during interviews.   The use of black-and-white photography, as an artistic medium, also provided the opportunity for a fully immersive experience by the researcher, since the photographic development of the film and the prints was conducted in the researcher's temporary darkroom. This was important, because the researcher was not only selecting what was in the pictures, but also had control of how the pictures were created so that external variables which could influence the final product were regulated. This artistic control over the visual rendering of places and contexts is meaningful since it addresses a concern that Tinkler (2014) voiced regarding the disappointment that photographers experience

when pictures do not reflect the scenes which were photographed because the contrast and tones were not captured properly. Control of the "creation" of the photographs was essential for maintaining the integrity of the originally curated scenes which were then used for eliciting responses from the project participants and later communicating situational nuances with the audience.

Photo-Interviews

Tinkler (2014, p. 2) refers to the use of photographs which have been generated by either the researcher or the participant, for the purpose of conducting interviews, "photo-interviewing" or "photo-elicitation." She argues that the use of photographs during interviewing can be useful for the purposes of facilitating dialogue and generating useful data for research projects. In addition, photographs can be used to "stimulate the narrator to remember" and this was useful for increasing the depths of conversation during the second-round interviews (Freund & Thompson, 2011, p. 3). What is even more significant is the opportunity for the researcher, who was the photographer, to confront "the realization that she or he knows little or nothing about the cultural information contained in the image" (Harper, 1998, p. 30). This occurs when the participant sees things in the photograph from a different perspective from the researcher, and this provides both additional data as well as deeper understandings of the phenomena being studied.

Tinkler (2014, p. 7) is emphatic that the use of photographs during interviews can "stimulate people to talk about what they know, think, experience, feel and remember" as well as prompting them to speak about their feelings with "emotionally charged responses." Jobling (2016) recognizes the value of photographs during interviews but cautions that they may "elicit post-memory rather than memory itself" creating the possibility that they occupy a "space between memory and history" (p. 284). Tinkler (2014) also warns about the possibility that too

many photographs employed during an interview can lead to mental and visual clutter causing confusion and distraction which is unproductive for the researcher. This potential drawback was mitigated by curating only two photographs of each school for each second-round interview, and these pictures were strategically chosen based upon publicly accessible vantage points which they provided for the viewer.

<div align="center">

Data Collection Methods

</div>

Data for this research project was accumulated from individual interviews, focus groups, published school documents, and photographs of the participants' secondary schools and communities. This means that narrative inquiry was used to mine data from the interviews and focus group sessions while textual analysis was used to analyze school curriculum documents and school mission, vision, and purpose statements. Photographic analysis was used to provide additional data and discover potential incongruities found in pictures of the participants' secondary school settings. These data sources were analyzed for information pertinent to the research questions about curriculum and yielded ample data for a meaningful study of the impact of CCR on North Carolina's N/A/L students.

Narrative Research

The goal of narrative research is to produce a story which combines the narratives of the participants in a fashion which provides their experiences a cohesive approach to expounding upon the research questions being studied (Bochner & Riggs, 2014). In order to facilitate this, the stories of the participants were elicited during interviews and then analyzed in order to evaluate the impact that CCR has had upon the lives of N/A/L students who studied in North Carolina's secondary schools. Clandinin (2013) suggests that narrative research involves the use of stories, and these can be generated from the interviews with the participants, whose

experiences were articulated during the telling of their lived experiences with secondary school CCR curriculum as well as the final product of the research project.

Interviews

Semi-structured interviewing was used to gather the narratives of the research participants in a manner which engaged them in the research process while also providing a degree of control due to the curation of guiding questions. Brinkman (2014) describes this approach as a middle-ground because it provides the participants a greater level of agency in the knowledge-producing activity that contributes data for the research project, while maintaining a focus on the research questions. Synchronous video meetings were scheduled with the participants using the Zoom platform to conduct interviews. This electronic meeting format was appropriate for conducting the interviews since the research was conducted within the context of a global pandemic when disease transmission was a legitimate safety concern. In addition, some of the participants might have been apprehensive about meeting with a stranger, and the electronic format allowed for easy capture of the audio data necessary for transcription.

Second-round interviews were also conducted using Zoom, and screen-sharing and shared files were used to present the photographs to the participants for their reflection. The questions for the second-round interviews were formulated after analysis of the transcripts from the first-round interviews of the participants, and this led to deeper questions which provided additional insights which were absent during the first round of interviews. The photographs provided the opportunity for reflexivity on the part of the participants, as they reflected on their curriculum experiences in the context of the places where their experiences were lived, so that habitus was brought to the forefront during the photo elicitation process (Holm, 2014). The second-round interviews were conducted prior to the focus group meeting, since the second-

round questions were likely to evoke more reflection on the part of the study participants and this would be beneficial for the participant directed conversations. Interview attrition was expected, and only three of the original eleven study participants were able to contribute data to all three interviewing rounds.

Focus Group Interviews

In order to increase the range and depth of available data for the research project, group interviews were conducted using Zoom so that the participants could collaborate and elicit additional narratives which may have been overlooked by the researcher. Glesne (2016, p. 125) suggests that one of the advantages of using group interviews is the possibility of "interaction within the group, stimulated by the researcher's questions." These spontaneous interactions provided additional insights about the CCR experiences of minoritized secondary school students which may have been missed in individual interviews. The focus groups meetings were scheduled after the second-round interviews were conducted, and ground rules (Appendix G) were communicated to the participants in advance of the planned meetings so that norms were established before the conversations were initiated.

The focus group meetings served two additional purposes since they established an additional layer of confirmation for the participant narratives, and they provided the study participants with a forum for agency and voice. The conversations were more organic than the first and second-round interviews because the participants were guiding the conversations themselves, with minimal interference from, or interaction with the researcher. While several questions were provided by the researcher to prime the dialogue, the conversations provided unique data because responses were not fettered by the constraints of the researcher and participants became active in the questioning process themselves. This participant led dialogue

opened the possibility of conversations which the researcher could not have anticipated, and

provided narrative data outside the margins of the researcher's paradigm.

Text Documents

The primary strategy for gathering CCR textual documents was conducting internet

searches using the Google search engine on a personal computer. This data collection occurred

after the proposal was approved and the initial phase of document gathering also involved

searching the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction (NCDPI) web site to gather as

many documents associated with CCR as possible. Several visits were planned for the State

Library of North Carolina (SLNC), in Raleigh, but due to miscommunication regarding my

library card, access to this data source was abandoned. After the first round of participant

interviews, a list of secondary schools (both middle and high school) was compiled for later

online document research. These documents included the schools' Mission, Vision, and Purpose

statements as well as any additional information available that pertained to CCR. Additional text

sources and other online documents were reviewed to find information about some of the CCR

metrics like college enrollment, dropout rates, standardized testing scores, and other information

relevant to Native American, Latinx, and African American students.

<p align="center">**Sampling Population**</p>

One of the insights gained from the pilot study was the challenge of recruiting research

participants whose experiences with the North Carolina CCR curriculum could comprehensively

address the research questions. The first step was determining a sample size, and then

delineating the characteristics of a participant population which could provide sufficient data to

allow the research project to speak authoritatively about the research problem. This was

important, since a pool of research participants who were all female African Americans were not

going to be able to provide the data necessary to understand the experiences that male and female N/A/L students have had with CCR in North Carolina secondary school classrooms. It is possible, however, that the study itself could have been modified to address the experiences of males, or females, or other specific minoritized students in a narrow fashion if this was the only data available from interviewing. This would have been frustrating given the initial scope of the research questions, but later studies could address the specific demographic groups which had been ignored. Recruitment of study participants was conducted using a hybrid sampling method, which combined snowball sampling with maximum variation sampling (Jensen, 2021).

Sample Size and Characteristics

The target sample size was 10-12 study participants who were distributed as evenly as possible between observable gender and race/ethnicity. The goal was to have a target sample which would have a balance of participants to provide narratives from Native American, Latinx, and African American male and female voices. This goal was not exclusionary, and this meant that participants were recruited without a bias aimed solely at alignment with the target participant sample. Likewise, potential research participants were not excluded to maintain an artificial demographic balance on the merits of race or ethnicity. As a consequence, the sample population for the research project included one African American male, six African American women, two Latinx males, one Latinx female, and one male who self-identified as Middle Eastern (see Table 1). Unfortunately, there were no study participants who identified as Native American, and the sample demographics skewed towards African American females in the same fashion as the pilot study. The reference sample only acted as a guidepost, to help ensure that the narratives of at least four differentiated categories were included, and the final result was five. This approach is consistent with Jensen's definition of "*Maximum variation sampling*" which

"aims to capture as wide a range of 'qualities' or phenomena as possible" based upon observable or established characteristics (2021, p. 239). Additional characteristics will be discussed below, so that the range of qualities attributable to the participants, which are relevant to the research questions, might be increased.

Another important demographic characteristic is level of education. There were five educational subgroups that were going to be used to differentiate participants' levels of educational attainment which included the following: high school graduates (HS), non-high school graduates (nHS), four-year college graduates (CG), college attendees without four-year diplomas (CA), and graduates of post-baccalaureate programs (GP). While there are several additional taxonomic classifications which could have been used to categorize the educational experiences of the participants, this simplified scheme would have allowed for sufficient data to infer linkage between the participants' experiences with curriculum in their secondary schools, and their consequent educational attainment. It should be noted that these categories were not intended as measurements of success strata, but rather a tool for better understanding how "College...Readiness" curriculum might be connected to post-secondary educational outcomes. Ideally, the sample population would have included a group of participants who were collectively able to provide narratives for all five of the educational attainment subgroups, but the sample was populated by CA, CG, and GP participants only. A wider range of educational attainment levels, reflected in the participant narratives, would have provided additional legitimacy for the study since the voices of college graduates, and four-year college attendees alone cannot be used to draw general conclusions about the impact of CCR on minoritized students in North Carolina.

Current career occupation was also an important characteristic for maintaining the relevance of the research project data. This classification is relevant to the research questions because it provides connectivity to the "Career Readiness" element of North Carolina's CCR curriculum framework. Four occupational categories were going to be considered for the purpose of sample demographics, and these include skilled trades (ST), licensed employment (LE), service industries (SV), and professional employment (PE). The ST category would have included employment in occupations such as welding, plumbing, HVAC, building trades, electrical, auto mechanics, truck driving, etc. which rely upon a marketable skill which is either taught or apprenticed. This is different than the LE category which requires licensure and could include dental technicians, licensed practical nurses (LPNs), certified nurses' aides (CNAs), real estate agents, and other similar fields which require unique training and licensed certification. The SV category included work in the retail and restaurant industries, delivering and sorting packages, housekeeping, groundskeeping, and gig economy jobs like driving for Lyft, Uber, Grubhub and other food delivery services. The PE category included all professional occupations which required a minimum of a four-year degree for employment. These career choices include employment as managers, teachers, doctors, architects, lawyers, etc. and are defined solely by the entry level requirement of a baccalaureate degree. It is important to emphasize that these occupational categories are not based upon wage hierarchies, although correlations between these occupations and income levels may be discernable. For instance, a truck driver may earn more than a teacher although an educator's career is arguably more prestigious. An additional caveat should be noted; occupations are not directly correlated with educational attainment since a participant might have a college degree but choose to work as a truck driver. Occupational demographics were not an important factor in the demographics of

the sample because all of the participants were full-time students at the time the first-found interviews were conducted, although three study participants would have been classified as LE if they were working full-time with their LPN certifications.

The age range for participants who were solicited to participate in the research project was 23-29 years of age. This age group was chosen strategically since the participants had to be young enough to remember their secondary school experiences while being old enough that their educational and career trajectories were starting to become established. Young adults who are going to complete post-secondary education, after leaving high school, would likely have taken this step by age 29 and many career pathways would have also become solidified by this age. Participants who were on the latter end of this age range might have had more difficulty recalling the details of their secondary school experiences, but they might have been more likely to understand how the curriculum may have changed their lives. The study participants were largely concentrated between the ages of 20-25, so most of them had vivid memories of their secondary school experiences, although none of them were working in career occupations. Participants were not asked for evidence of their age, but the solicitation flyer was explicit about the selection criteria, and interview questions about secondary schooling provided for deductive verification.

Hybrid Sampling Method

Sampling was conducted using a hybrid sampling method which combined snowball sampling, which was initially used to recruit participants, with maximum variation sampling to ensure an adequate range of demographics to provide answers for the research questions. Snowball sampling, which uses contact information from a research participant to recruit additional participants, is a form of convenience sampling and it was used due to its efficiency

for soliciting research participants (Jensen, 2021). However, a maximum variation sampling criteria was kept in the foreground using racial/ethnic, gender, educational attainment, and career characteristics in an attempt to ensure that the research participant pool provided an appropriate range of attributes for the study. This hybrid approach to sampling should have addressed some of the problems of recruitment, while also mitigating the potential negative connotations associated with snowball sampling which has been critiqued for low credibility by Glesne (2016) and Patton (2002), but it was not completely successful because the study sample was quickly saturated after sending out the recruitment flyer.

Data Analysis

Transcription of Interviews

The audio files that were recorded during the synchronous interviews were transcribed using Rev.com, which uses artificial intelligence (AI) to create transcripts from audio files for a nominal fee. One of the benefits of using AI for transcription was the requisite walk-through of the transcript, while listening to the audio file, to ensure the integrity of the finished text. This additional step not only ensured the reliability of the transcripts, but it also provided the opportunity to become fully immersed in the interview, without external stimuli, so that additional insights could be gained (Glesne, 2016). The transcribing of interview files was conducted within twenty-four hours of each interview, to better maintain contextual integrity. Notes were also taken during the transcribing process, because of the opportunity to go back to the video and audio files to capture nuances that may have been overlooked during the original interview or transcription process.

Another benefit of using Rev.com for transcribing the audio from the interviews is that the program allows playback while reviewing the text produced by the AI software. This serves

two important purposes: 1) Transcribing errors were easily caught and corrected and 2) The review process provided additional data analysis opportunities which better highlighted pauses, word fumbles, and other verbal cues which better contextualized the emotional state of the research participant. The final step of the transcription process involved an analysis of the transcript while viewing the video file with its attendant audio recording. This editing pass provided an opportunity for marking body language data on the interview transcript so that implicit data was also documented. This step was beneficial since it provided the researcher with the opportunity to pay full attention to the participant, during the interview, since these notes did not have to be written while they were speaking. Unfortunately, this final step could only be completed for the study participants who had their cameras on during the interviews.

Focus group interview transcripts were created in a similar fashion, with a particular emphasis on capturing all distinct items of the dialogue, which at times were overlapping. In addition, notes taken during the transcription process focused on oral cues which helped to provide data to either refute or support the spoken responses, and especially the reactions to particular questions (Glesne, 2016). These subjective observations also provided cues about sensitive topics, levels of conviction and provided additional insights regarding the research questions because the focus group participants played a vital role in nurturing conversations which might not have taken place in a single-participant interview. A column of observation notes was documented on the transcripts so that they were synchronized with the dialogue which had been converted to text. Subtle nuances like sighs, inhalations, etc. were documented using shorthand symbols as recommended by Perakyla and Ruusuvuori (2018).

Transcripts were also created from the second-round individual participant interviews which focused on discussions of the photographs taken of the schools, the communities where

the participants attended secondary school, and the physical aspects of their school buildings. While the transcribing process was similar to the previous methods used, picture coding was used to identify the photographs being presented and discussed with the participants. This coding used alphabetically chronological letters to link school photographs with participant pseudonyms, in a list which was maintained as a separate key. An example would be a series of photographs marked "W" which refers to the 23rd school that was photographed and was linked to the participant pseudonym "Anna." These photograph codes were distinct from the codes used to organize the data from the interviews, and focus groups sessions, since their only purpose was rapid identification as opposed to thematic organization. As such, the photograph coding was used as an additional shorthand method for quickly identifying pictures as they were discussed in the interviews, so that they could be properly placed in digital file folders for ready access when screen-shared with the study participants.

Textual Analysis

Bhattacharya (2017) recommends using a wide range of documents for qualitative research projects, and these sources of data could include policies, lesson plans, websites, photographs, and audio-visual data. While many of these styles of documents provide the opportunity for textual analysis, some of them are more likely to direct the reading by the researcher so that the data collected is in line with a "strongly preferred" interpretation (Watson, 1997, p. 90). This is likely to be the case for school curriculum documents, mission and purpose statements, and other secondary school informational texts which often have headers and labels which influence the reader's interpretation. Researcher reflexivity was used to counter the impact of this influence so that the information gleaned from these sources was useful and relevant data for the research project.

While the photographs were not textual by themselves, they could gain a new meaning if they were captioned, and this could have led to bias on the part of the researcher and/or the research participants (Rose, 2016). Labelling a picture of a secondary school with the caption "Broken Windows" to bring the viewer's attention to some of the physical defects of the building, could have the same impact that labels on school documents have in terms of guiding the interpretation. For this reason, the photographs were not labelled with descriptive captions but were only identified by assigned aliases which were linked to each study participant's pseudonym.

Coding

The coding process began with a first cycle coding of the three rounds of interviews, the photographs, and the school documents, using words or short phrases to summarize the salient attributes of each piece of data (Saldaña, 2009). Coffee and Atkinson (1996) suggest that the coding process involves both data reduction and complication so that the goal is to both make sense of the data through organizational strategies, while also providing the opportunity for new discoveries. This approach meant that several coding passes were made so that movement from categories to themes could be achieved using observable patterns. These patterns were then used to create single sentence generalizations which expressed relationships in the data (Hatch, 2002).

An inductive analysis of the first-round coding was conducted to move from the "specific to the general" in successive coding passes as suggested by Hatch (2002, p. 161). Frames of analysis were then created, and this involved searching the raw data using Atlas.ti to find the occurrences of key words or phrases that became prominent during the initial (first cycle) coding. Saldaña (2009) suggests the use of analytic memos as a strategy for generating both codes and categories, especially since the memos can be used as an effective tool for coding the

photographs. Richards and Richards (1994) refer to the process of using multiple coding passes to move from data to theory as "data-theory boot-strapping*"* and they support the use of Qualitative Data Analysis Software (QDAS) because of its effectiveness at streamlining the iterative processes required. Glesne (2016, p. 207) also advocates for the use of QDAS since it can manage large chunks of data in addition to forcing researchers "to carefully work through…data in ways you might not without it prompting you." This prompting arguably increased the level of rigor in the research project since the QDAS provided the necessary prompts to ensure that coding was being rigorously conducted.

The final step in the coding process was finding specific passages, statements, and evidence which specifically support the generalized statements (theory) that were created from the domains identified during the inductive coding process (Hatch, 2002). Hatch (2002, p. 171) also emphasizes the need to "complete an analysis within domains*"* to move beyond "description" into what Wolcott (1994) describes as "analysis and interpretation." This final analysis of the domains was useful for providing additional depth and complexity for the research project since the possibility of additional discovery could be cultivated. This stage of analysis occurred after all of the data had been collected, and the multiple coding passes were completed with fidelity.

After first round interviews were completed, and the audio recordings were converted into transcripts for analysis, they were reviewed to create a list of second-round interview questions for the study participants. These questions (see Appendix E) helped to fill in gaps in information, and also provided additional insights about experiences the project participants had with CCR. However, prior to conducting the second-round interviews these new questions had to be approved by the IRB which was understaffed and facing major delays in completing

proposal reviews. Understanding the severity of the delays, which could mean waiting as long as

ten to twelve weeks for approval, the focus group questions (Appendix F) were also crafted and

submitted along with the focus group ground rules (Appendix G) so that data collection for the

project could be completed without further undue delays.

The necessary documents were submitted on January 24, 2023, and approval with

"Exempt" status was granted on March 20, 2023. This long delay was unfortunate since it may

have led to additional attrition of study participants who had not been in contact with me since

the first-round interviews were completed.   It should be noted however, that there were

additional unforeseen delays, since the period after the initial interviews was occupied with

creating transcripts, reviewing them to extract data, and visiting the 28 unique secondary schools

and communities that were attended by the participants in the study. The total attrition rate was

just under 50% since only six of the eleven original study participants were willing or able to

contribute their insights by answering questions during the second-round interviews. Five of the

six final participants were willing to meet in focus groups, but due to scheduling issues the first

meeting was conducted with only three participants, with a second meeting scheduled for two

people with the hopes that the sixth participant would join. At the last minute, however, the fifth

second-round participant had a schedule conflict and only one person showed up for the second

focus group meeting (see Table 1). Roughly two thirds of the study participants had their

cameras on during the first-round interviews and these participants were more likely to continue

participating in the research project over time. This pattern is not surprising, however, since the

participants who voluntarily (it was not a stipulated requirement) had their cameras on for the

first-round interview developed a greater rapport with the researcher and likely had personalities

which were more comfortable with the interview process. The coded data from the three rounds

of interviews will be presented in Chapter 6 with a focus on the key themes derived from the

data.

Table 1. Participation Matrix for Study Participants

Participant Name	Round 1 Interview	Round 2 Interview	Focus Group
Jenna	Yes	Yes	No
James	Yes	No	No
Sam	Yes	No	No
Sarah	Yes+	Yes+	Yes
Shelby	Yes+	Yes+	No*
Lisa	Yes+	Yes+	Yes
Anna	Yes+	Yes+	No
Beth	Yes	No	No
Heather	Yes+	Yes+	Yes
David	Yes+	No	No
Ben	Yes+	No	No

***Codes: NO* = Attended second focus group meeting but it was canceled
due to no-show of other participants
Yes+ = Camera ON during interview

Ethical Considerations

Recruitment

One of the important ethical considerations for this research project was maintaining an

appropriate sensitivity regarding the minoritized status of the participants. Recruitment was

conducted in a tactful fashion to avoid drawing unnecessary attention to either racial or ethnic

identities which might cause embarrassment, frustration, or even anger on the part of the

recruited individuals. Likewise, recruitment was carried out discreetly to avoid "othering"

members of racial/ethnic groups which did not meet the criteria for participation in the research

project. One of the strategies for maintaining professionalism during the recruitment process

was the use of a recruitment flyer (Appendix A) which explained the purpose of the research

project and provided researcher contact information for individuals who met the criteria and

wanted to participate. The recruitment flyer also provided information about the scope of the

time commitment (potentially three interview sessions of an hour each) and the compensation being offered (a $25 gift card for each completed session) for sacrificing personal time. Most important, however, was the clause that allowed participants to drop out of the study at any time, and for any reason, if they felt uncomfortable or did not want to answer the questions in an interview. Wertz and Wertz (2011, p. 363) address the issue of the risks of "consciousness raising" which could potentially lead a participant to respond to the interviews negatively due to disturbing information that they either divulged, or became reacquainted with, due to the questions being asked. The provision of an exit clause provided participants with the security that they needed if they became uncomfortable during their interview, or a focus group meeting, and changed their minds about participation. All recruitment data was stored in a password protected digital box folder and will be deleted five years after the research project is completed, and access to the raw data is either no longer necessary or ethically required. Research participants will still be able to contact the researcher, if they wish, since they have my contact information, and this will provide them with another mode of personal agency.

Human research participants must be protected from harm in any form, whether psychological or physical, and Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval is one way to minimize unforeseen risks to project participants (Wertz & Wertz, 2011). In addition to providing participants with consent forms, the researcher submitted the project design to the University of North Carolina at Greensboro (UNCG) Office of Research Integrity for IRB approval. This requirement was completed prior to interviewing participants and the application was filed after the dissertation proposal was accepted by the committee. While the project appeared to be innocuous, with little potential for causing harm, Agee (2009, p. 440) warns that "inquiries into other people's lives are *always* an exercise in ethics." What might appear to be a

harmless question could potentially cause trauma for someone dredging up painful memories, or the inadvertent disclosure of someone's identity could potentially cost them their job. All recommendations from the IRB were followed to safeguard the personal wellbeing of all project participants.

Anonymity

Glesne (2016) argues that one of the primary responsibilities of the researcher is to prevent harm to the participants and this was accomplished by maintaining confidentiality and protecting the anonymity of all data connected with the project. This meant assigning non-disclosing pseudonyms for all participants using Anglicized names which helped to mask both their race and/or ethnicity. Names like Anna, Jenna, Sam, James, etc. were sufficiently ambiguous that they provided cover for the minoritized study participants since there is no clear linkage to either their racial or ethnic identity. Photographs of schools were carefully framed to avoid identifying names or signage so that places were also provided with anonymity as a means of protecting the sanctity of the study participants' lives and maintaining an appropriate ethical balance (Tayaben, 2014). The digitally secured audio and visual recordings were accessed only when the transcripts were created, and the pseudonyms were applied immediately thereafter. Data which identified research participants by their real names was stored in the password protected digital Box and only anonymous data was accessible in the computer files and hardcopy documents. Pseudonyms were also used with all place and school names connected to the participants, with the exception of North Carolina college or university names referenced during conversations, to provide an additional layer of protection for the research participants. Finally, a comprehensive consent form was provided to participants (Appendix B) which

addressed the purpose of the research project, the methods, the expectations of research

participants, potential risks, and the compensation for their personal time (Glesne, 2016).

Researcher Positionality

I am a middle-aged African American, of mixed-race descent, who has spent most of my

life living in the United States. I have studied in both private and public schools for my

elementary and secondary schooling, and this has impacted my views about public education

policy and curriculum. I have studied extensively in the fields of Economics and Education, and

I also hold a bachelor's degree in mechanical engineering. Due to our educations and career

opportunities, my wife and I enjoy the privilege of an upper middle-class lifestyle, and this

directly impacts my views about opportunity, responsibility, and upward mobility.

I am motivated to study the impacts of CCR curriculum on minoritized youth because my

experiences as an educator have directly exposed me to CCR as it is being used by schools as a

part of the curriculum framework. The CCR ideals are lofty, and promise equitable opportunities

for all students in North Carolina, but they appear to fall short of their goals when applied to

N/A/L students in secondary schools. My personal observations of CCR suggest that it is just

another educational initiative which privileges the dominant culture at the expense of minoritized

students across the state. My anecdotal experiences with CCR have provided me with hunches,

but they did not provide meaningful data about the impact of the framework on minoritized

youth in North Carolina. For this reason, I needed the voices of Native American, African

American, and Latinx secondary students to confirm what I already believed was occurring in

classrooms across the state.

While I recently worked as an assistant principal, in a public North Carolina middle

school, I believe that I was able to analyze the project data with objectivity. My racial status has

made me aware of the subtle manners in which institutionalized discrimination is carried out

against minoritized students in either implicit or explicit ways and my personal understanding of

racism has opened my eyes to the challenges that minoritized students face in our society as they

navigate public spaces. My prior employment as a secondary school administrator did not make

me defensive about discriminatory practices, but instead inquisitive about the impact, since I

have first-hand knowledge about how curriculum is being delivered in classrooms. The

experiences of minoritized youth in North Carolina's secondary school systems resonate with me

since I would have had similar experiences if I had grown up in this state. For this reason, I

engaged in the research project with the intention of learning about the experiences that Native

American, Latinx, and African American students have had with CCR, and the impact it has had

upon their lives.

Limitations of Research Project

This study was focused on the question of how North Carolina's CCR curriculum

framework has impacted the lives of Native American, Latinx, and African American secondary

school students during the past thirteen years since it was first formally introduced. While the

project intended to address the experiences of minoritized students, in North Carolina, its

findings are not useful for extrapolating or generalizing the curriculum experiences of other

groups of minoritized students such as Asians, LGBTQ, or other subsets which are not generally

included in the dominant Caucasian culture. Furthermore, the small sample size will not provide

enough data to make the findings universally applicable across the state of North Carolina.

Despite these shortcomings the project does provide insights about CCR curriculum, and how it

impacts the lives of minoritized students, and this information could potentially be useful for

reform projects in the future.

Conclusions

Curriculum impacts all students in North Carolina and the CCR framework, which was adopted in 2009, is no exception. "How" the CCR curriculum framework impacted the lives of African American and Latinx students, was a question which was studied by this research project in an attempt to develop a deeper understanding of how educational policies affect the lives of particular minoritized youth. Critical Race Theory and Arts Based Research were used to study the effects that CCR has had on both the educational and working lives of minoritized students as they became adults. Data was collected using photographic research methods, document analysis, and both individual and focus group interviews. An inductive approach to analyzing the data helped the research move from raw data to generalizations which are supported by the qualitative data. These generalizations provided useful insights regarding the real-life impacts that educational policymaking has had on the lives of young Native American, African American and Latinx students in North Carolina. If curriculum frameworks like CCR are having an adverse impact, on the lives of these minoritized students, reform efforts need to be undertaken in order to provide for better futures in education and employment. This research project aspires to act as a catalyst for this potentially worthwhile effort.

The timeline for data gathering was an important feature of this research project since it had to be aligned with the school calendar of the district in which I was employed. This alignment was vital since the work schedule during student school days was unpredictable and would have interfered with successful data collection. The research proposal was successfully defended and accepted at the end of the 2021/2022 academic school year so that data collection could begin during June, following dismissal of students for their summer break. The IRB submission was completed in June 2022 but due to long delays in reviewing research proposals

the approval was not granted until early August when we were preparing to welcome our middle

school students back to campus for the new school year. The first-round interviews were

completed by the second week of October, and data was analyzed to plan the travel to the school

campuses to take pictures. After the pictures were taken, second-round interview questions,

focus group questions, and focus group ground rules were developed for submission to the IRB.

Another long wait for approval meant a delay in commencing the next rounds of data collection,

but during this period of waiting the negatives were developed, photographs were printed, and

additional text analysis was conducted. A revised schedule was developed in June 2023 with the

objective of completing a dissertation rough draft before the winter holiday. Figure 1. provides a

graphic representation of the research project timeline. An important personal concession that

was made, towards the end of the project, was my resignation from my employment as an

assistant principal at a middle school. During the 2022/2023 school year we experienced a high

level of administrative turnover (four positions in seven months) and my workload at the school

increased dramatically. As a consequence, I made the decision to resign after the end of the

school year, in June 2023, so that the timeline could be executed with fidelity in order to bring

the study to its conclusion.

Figure 1. Research Project Timeline
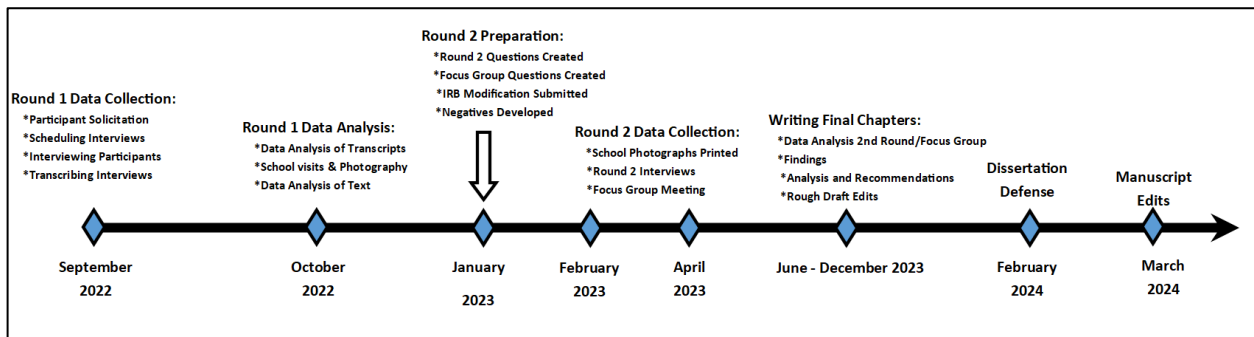
CHAPTER IV: PARTICIPANT VIGNETTES

Data collection began after IRB approval was granted to the research project in July 2022, and this involved the solicitation of research participants through use of an email address listserv of students at Thompson State University (TSU). The listserv was obtained from the Office of Student Success and students were blind-copied the recruitment letter (Appendix A) which outlined the demographic characteristics being sought for the study. One of the limitations of this approach was that all initial subjects would be university students who had matriculated to college and successfully navigated the admissions and financial aid processes. I was hopeful that I would be able to recruit additional participants who did not attend college, through use of snowball sampling, but my attempts to broaden the demographics of the participants were thwarted by dishonest behavior which was incentivized by the gift cards that were offered as compensation for the time spent during interviews.

The participation bias, which leaned heavily towards African American college educated women, which was first documented in the pilot study, was persistent during recruitment efforts and this impacted the data collected. I attempted to broaden the sample by asking participants if they would be willing to forward the recruitment email to their high school friends who did not attend college, but this caused a troubling distortion which led me to cease recruitment after an initial group of eleven individuals participated in the first-round interviews. One of the participants asked if they could post the recruitment letter on their social media accounts and I was excited about the possibility of enlarging the participant pool beyond the college-educated demographic marker. I scheduled eight interviews with participants who had responded to the social media posts, and I was excited about speaking to these individuals whom I believed would provide meaningful data about the CCR experiences of students who had not attended college.

My first interview with one of the new study participants was confusing, for a host of reasons, and the data that was gathered was of questionable value. While conducting the Zoom interviews I did not require the participants to be visible on screen since I wanted them to be comfortable during the interviewing process. I believed that their responses might be more earnest if they were unfettered by the potential discomfort which could be caused by my visual access to elements of their lives (appearance, living spaces, location, etc.) which were not relevant to the questions that I wanted to discuss, and that they did not want to share. This approach proved to be problematic during the interview with the first social media recruit since I could not see him, and he did not answer questions in a genuine fashion. His voice was muffled, and I constantly had to ask him to repeat his answers since his responses were unclear and unintelligible. Another warning sign was the fact that he repeatedly asked me about the gift card, and it was clear that this was his only motivation for participating in the study. At the end of the interview, I thanked him for his time and sent the electronic gift card which I had promised in the recruitment letter, and he had asked about several times. I reflected on the data that I had gathered during the interview, and I realized that I could not use it since many of the responses seemed intentionally vague and elusive. None of the school names provided during the interview could be verified as being real schools in North Carolina, and this led me to believe that the participant had not attended secondary school in the state and had fabricated the information which they had provided regarding their schooling.

I had received a flurry of responses to schedule interviews from non-TSU email addresses and they all shared common traits such as names which were atypical because they were comprised of first-name, first-name combinations such as David Matt, Larry Barry, Peter Paul, and so forth. My suspicion about their validity was confirmed when the second scheduled

90

interview began and the voice of the participant was similar to the voice of the person I had

previously interviewed, and their behavior was identical in terms of muffled short responses

which were unintelligible. I suspected that I was speaking to the same person, so I asked him to

repeat the name of both his middle and high school, and the county in which they were located. I

conducted a quick Google search which indicated that the schools he named were not in the

county that he cited, and could not be located anywhere in North Carolina. At this point I asked

him to turn on his video so that I could see him, and he reluctantly complied. I could see that he

was likely in another country because of the construction of the hut in which he was sitting, as

well as other cues like the single light bulb hanging by a wire from the ceiling, and his accent

which sounded African to me. I then told him that I could not use the data from the interview

because it was false, and he asked if he would still receive a gift card. I told him that it would

not be appropriate to provide compensation for his deceit and he did not argue despite obvious

signs that he was remorseful about being caught in his deception.

I was now suspicious of all of the respondents who were outside the TSU system, and I

was painfully aware of the possibility that this participant may have been attempting to receive

compensation for multiple interviews. As a consequence, I began the ensuing interviews with a

couple quick questions which I would then fact check before continuing. After I spoke with two

additional hucksters, I contacted the rest of the non-TSU appointments to let them know that I

would not be conducting any future interviews since I had gathered enough data already. At this

point I had eleven legitimate interviews, and all of the participants also indicated a willingness to

participate in the second-round interviews as well as the focus group meetings.

Despite my frustration, over the time and expense caused by the con artists, I was

satisfied with the data gathered from the eleven TSU participants who participated in the

interviews with a sense of curiosity and sincerity. Echoing my experience with the pilot study, many of the participants said that they were grateful for the opportunity to discuss their experiences with CCR, during their secondary schooling, and viewed the interview experience as cathartic. Information provided by each study participant has been summarized below in order to provide a reference point for understanding both the individual and some of the secondary school experiences which shaped their educational trajectory. These vignettes will also be useful for better understanding the Visual Landscapes presented in Chapter 5.

Jenna

Jenna attended an arts-based middle school in an urban setting where she found ample opportunities for expressing herself creatively. Most of her schooling, starting with elementary school, was in magnet programs which were designed to provide unique academic and career advancement opportunities. She first attended high school at City Heights Early College, but she later moved to another city where she attended Arbor Village High School. Here she experienced education through the lens of a minoritized student, since she was one of only ten African American students in her senior class of roughly four-hundred pupils.

Jenna's move to her new high school was a challenging transition since she had been accustomed to the stigma of low socioeconomic status in her previous secondary schools, but this stigma was now magnified by her positionality as a racial minority also. She suggested that Arbor Village High School was primarily focused on providing resources for "Brown Asians" who constituted the majority racial demographic and were largely focused on gaining admission to the more selective universities like Duke, Chapel Hill, and NC State:

You know, if we weren't, if we didn't have a certain GPA, it was just kind of like "Oh, have you thought about community college?" And you're just like "So you're not going to try and fake me up to at least try, or anything like that?"

Jenna's frustration with her advisor pointing her towards community colleges, when she graduated, was one of many instances of differential treatment that she felt she was subjected to when she was at Arbor Village High School. During her senior year, all the African American students who were in her cohort were called to the guidance office for a presentation about a needs-based college scholarship that was being offered by a college in the state. Jenna was indignant about this because the implication was that only the African American students in the school had low socioeconomic status and would thus qualify for the scholarships.

She also recalls an awkward scene at the school's college fair when a wide range of schools including NC A&T University, had booths set up to answer admissions questions for students who would be graduating at the end of the spring semester. The A&T booth had a young admissions advisor representing the school and Jenna said that she was set up for failure because only a few students and their parents stopped at the booth for information, because most of the graduating class was not interested in a HBCU for their higher education. When Jenna graduated from high school, she attended a community college and enrolled in the engineering pathway despite getting accepted into Meredith College which she could not afford to attend. This was ironic because her mother had been accepted into Davidson College, when she graduated from high school, but was unable to matriculate for the same reason. Instead, her mother attended UNC-Charlotte and she encouraged Jenna to also continue her education there. Jenna initially wanted to transfer to NC State University from the community college, but she

93

chose to enroll at TSU because she felt it was a better fit once she realized that she did not want

to study engineering, and TSU had the undergraduate program she was currently interested in.

Jenna's secondary school experiences were revealing since she mentioned a bit of tension

with her guidance counselors since she felt that she constantly had to self-advocate to stay in the

magnet programs and take Advanced Placement courses in high school. She suggested that she

felt ignored by her high school advisor, with whom she met only once during her senior year,

since the advisor seemed to be more preoccupied with students who were applying to more

competitive undergraduate programs. This was an interesting revelation given that fact that she

was accepted to Meredith College and had received a strong STEM education beginning when

she was in elementary school. Jenna feels that she was able to navigate the admissions process

successfully because of her personal assertiveness, and her mother's guidance, which made up

for the lack of contact with her assigned guidance counselor at Arbor Village. During her

secondary school studies, Jenna recalls hearing about CCR frequently because the constant

refrain from her teachers was "you've got to go to college or you're not going to be doing much

in the world."

<p style="text-align:center">James</p>

James attended both middle school and high school in the same rural community perched

in the mountains of North Carolina. He says that he has been most impacted by his middle

school history teacher who was "a person of color" and stood out in a small town where there

were few people who looked like him racially. This teacher set the stage for James to become

politically engaged, and this passion was later nurtured in high school by his AP Government

class. James was motivated to pursue a college education by his peers, and his participation in

mock trials, which initially led to an inclination for him to become a lawyer. James experienced

several incidents of discrimination during his secondary schooling, and he believes these experiences had an impact on his college trajectory.

Despite his early interest in studying law, James chose to major in international business as an undergraduate because of advising he received during high school. He is currently a computer science major, and this was significant because he had a passion for math when he was in middle school, despite the challenges that he faced because he was in the "quote unquote bad student class" where the students harassed teachers until they quit. He was placed in the foundational math class his freshman year, because he had missed math instruction during middle school because of extra English language support he was receiving to strengthen his English-speaking skills. James took pre-calculus, his junior year of high school, because he was attending the local community college as part of a dual-enrollment program, and he had hoped that this would allow him to take AP Calculus his senior year. He was extremely frustrated when his guidance counselors "adamantly refused to put him in that class" even though he had successfully taken Pre-Calculus at the community college. He believes that the decision to keep him out of the class was influenced by his low socioeconomic status because the teacher's roster was filled with more affluent students, and he was being raised by his mother in a single-parent household. He also believes that placement in the "bad math class" his freshman year meant that he was viewed as an inferior student during the rest of his high school tenure.

In addition to his negative experiences being tracked in his math classes during high school, James also felt that he was being passively blocked by school leaders from opportunities which could have helped him strengthen his high school resume for applying to college. During high school, James ran for student class president, but they did not allow him to speak to his classmates during the campaign because they told him that this was something that "usually

people with higher GPAs" pursued. He was subjected to a similar indignity, his senior year of high school, when the class was voting for a student who would give a graduation speech in addition to the class Valedictorian. Before the ballots were submitted to the student body his name was removed, and he believes that either his ethnicity or his socioeconomic status was a factor in the decision. James was born in Egypt, and he feels that he has experienced "the disadvantages of being a person of color and all of the disadvantages of not being dark enough."

Sam

Sam attended middle school at a small campus located in the countryside about six miles from the center of one of North Carolina's larger metropolitan areas. He recalls that his passion with computers began at this time when he took a keyboarding class and learned the Q-W-E-R-T-Y structure of the keyboard's arrangement as well as the proper protocols for writing emails to communicate with others. He attended Jefferson Early College for high school, and he only applied for the college preparatory program because his middle school librarian planted the idea in his head during their conversations, and also wrote a recommendation for him. During Sam's public schooling he attended predominantly African American schools although he moved out of state during the fifth grade and attended a majority White school where he was one of only three students categorized as black in the whole school. He returned to North Carolina where he attended Plains Middle School to complete grades six through eight in preparation for high school.

When Sam started high school, he believed that he wanted to go to college to study law, but his continued interest in computers would lead to his enrollment in a bachelor's program in Computer Science after he completed his associate degree at Jefferson Early College. One of his most memorable courses in the Early College was a public speaking course which not only

prepared him for interviewing, but also improved his self-confidence in general. Sam acknowledges that he struggled with Math during secondary school, and this would lead to him dropping a level so that he could gain a better understanding of the fundamentals. He recalls how he felt that he let his math teacher down because she had recommended him for the advanced class in eighth grade, and he was later encouraged to transfer out of it in order to remediate his skills.

When Sam attended Jefferson Early College, he says that CCR was discussed on almost a daily basis with the students:

Yeah, I would say yes, because I heard that almost practically on a daily basis. They were always trying to teach us like, oh, you have to know this for college. You have to know this. You have to be able to do this. You're gonna have to be doing this, and this. So, I heard a lot about my college readiness…

Sam was frustrated because he felt there was considerable pressure from the school staff for the students in the program to continue their educations at the host university, rather than applying for other programs that might fit their career needs better. This created considerable tension with the students because many of them were interested in other colleges and universities since they had already experienced campus life on the host campus and "…wanted to go somewhere else and try other places instead." According to Sam, the director of the early college program was also employed at the host university, and this conflict of interest would manifest itself in other aspects of the students' lives. Despite this constant pressure, many of the students would matriculate at other college campuses in North Carolina to continue their academic studies after graduating from high school.

One of Sam's challenges in secondary school was related to his ethnicity because of his West African heritage. He often felt isolated from his classmates, "even Black students," because his cultural identity was closely aligned with his "African roots." He was extremely frustrated that most of the harassment he received at school was from African American students who even called him derogatory names that were centered solely around his cultural background. When asked about his class selection at Jefferson Early College, he recalled being forced to take classes that were closely aligned with the host university's undergraduate programs, with little opportunity for setting his own schedule. He believes that budgetary constraints reduced the number of class offerings, and this meant a standard curriculum for everyone.

Sarah

In order to complete her secondary school requirements, Sarah attended three schools in total, two geographically close to each other and the third some distance away from these two. Prior to moving to North Carolina, after the sixth grade, Sarah lived in the North where she enjoyed the diversity and "melting pot" demographics. When she moved to North Carolina she was often told that she was "too uppity" and she quickly had to come to terms with the racial issues and discrimination against Hispanic people that she witnessed in her schools. When she first arrived in North Carolina she attended Lesterview Middle School which is in a small city near the coast. The following year her family moved to a large city, and she attended Maverick Middle School. Her family would move back to the same city where she attended Lesterview Middle, and she finished her secondary schooling at Washington High School where she joined the National Forensics League and became engaged in formal debates which strengthened both her social and public speaking skills. Sarah composed original oratory pieces for the National Forensics League competitions, and she received several awards for her essays.

Sarah credits her Advanced Placement classes, from high school, for preparing her for her college classes and these courses included AP European History, AP English Language and Composition, and AP English Literature. These classes helped her to strengthen her critical thinking skills and increased her academic maturity since she learned to read with intentionality and focus. Sarah's family also supported her academic goals, and despite the fact that neither of her parents finished college, they were able to provide her with valuable guidance in course selections as well as assistance navigating the admissions process. This was significant because Sarah says that she did not receive any college advising from her high school counselors, and she attributes this to their busy schedules since there were only two counselors for a student body of over a thousand high schoolers. One of Sarah's most interesting courses involved elective Advanced Health courses, which nurtured her interest in the medical field. Washington High School had a High School Connections program which allowed juniors and seniors to take classes at a nearby community college. Sarah was able to take Certified Nursing Assistant (CNA) classes at the community college, and she graduated from high school with her CNA-I and CNA-II licenses. This has been beneficial for her since she has been able to work as a CNA while studying for her bachelor's degree in college.

One of Sarah's frustrations, with her high school, was that she felt that while they did not have the resources for providing meaningful college advising, the school was readily accessible to military recruiters who frequently pitched military careers to the students. Sarah recalls telling a recruiter that she wanted to be a doctor and the response from the female officer was:

You know, you are not going to have the funds to do that. Why would you want your

parents to go into debt trying to help you make a dream in the future when you can just

go to the military, and we can handle all that for you. Like your dreams could be a

reality, if you just signed a paper for a few little years, and it wouldn't bother you.

Sarah was irritated by this high-pressure recruitment tactic since she had the financial support at

home to pay for college, and she recognized that other students may have joined the military

because of their financial situation "without even understanding what it could have entailed." In

addition to recruiters from the army, Sarah recalls her classes being interrupted by

representatives from the Navy, and even the Coast Guard. Their access to the student body was

practically unlimited, and according to Sarah they spoke to almost every student at the school on

a regular basis. Sarah attributes this recruitment pressure to the proximity of her school to

several military bases, and the pervasiveness of military culture in the city where her school was

located. She does not recall many discussions about CCR other than the guidance counselors

holding two FAFSA (Free Application for Federal Student Aid) nights, for parents to attend with

their students, to apply for financial aid for college.

Shelby

Shelby grew up in a small town, located about thirty miles from the beach, and attended

Weston Elementary School for grades kindergarten through eighth. This combination

elementary/middle school is atypical for public schools in North Carolina but is not surprising

given the population of her hometown. She experienced considerable racism during her

schooling and was often called "beaner" by her classmates because of her Hispanic heritage

which was Cuban/Columbian. Shelby was the first person from her family to attend college. and

according to her account she was lucky because she did not have the resources to pay for higher

education, but received an athletic scholarship because of her running ability. She expresses

gratitude at being able to go to college, because her secondary schools seemed more focused on agriculture and vocational career training rather than college preparation.

When Shelby went to Burris High School, she was originally taking classes in the standard level curriculum, despite a desire to move up to the honors track. She had originally been interested in taking honors courses her freshman year, but she was discouraged by one of her teachers, a middle-aged White woman, who saw her enrolling in honors classes and told her "You will never be able to survive that." When her teacher embarrassed her with this criticism, in front of her peers, she changed her classes to the standard level curriculum. Shelby had high grades during her freshman year and was promoted to the honors academic track for her sophomore year, when one of her teachers suggested that she take more challenging courses because of her strong academic performance. This changed her career trajectory since she was able to take AP classes, which broadened her academic horizons and encouraged her to consider university studies.

Shelby was frustrated by the lack of AP courses at Burris High School since she felt that she was not adequately prepared for college because of a lack of rigor. She says that there were only four AP courses offered, and when she arrived at college many of her peers came from high schools where as many as twenty AP classes were available. The four classes that she recalls were AP Biology, AP Government, AP U.S. History, and AP Calculus. Shelby initially said that only 25% of her graduating class went on to college. After reflecting on her answer, for a moment, she said that this number included the students who went on to study at the local community college, so she did not feel that many went on to four-year programs. Shelby had the opportunity to enroll in the early college program in her district, but she did not follow through with this academic program because the early college did not have athletics and she was

passionate about participating in sports. According to Shelby, this was the only time that she

heard any information about CCR, since it was promoted as one of the benefits of attending the

early college.

Shelby recalls that athletics were her gateway to university studies since she was the first

person in her family to attend college, and her family did not have the financial resources to pay

for her higher education:

It was really that coach, honestly, that coach that was at TSU that had sent me a letter.

We got invited to come here and see the school, so I did. And then the only other school I

kind of heard about was also because I was being recruited. I was being recruited by

Meredith, the old girls' college in Raleigh, but it's private and it was way too expensive,

and it's like a D-2 or a D-3, so they couldn't give me any money.

This recollection on Shelby's part was particularly interesting, because Shelby's talent as a

runner was widely known since she often ran at the state championship meets, as an individual

qualifier, and the large crowds of spectators often included scouts from a wide range of

universities and colleges. The combination of teachers advocating for her to take a college

preparatory track, combined with recruiters from various colleges, helped Shelby navigate a

pathway to a four-year program, despite the other obstacles that seemed to be in her path.

Shelby discussed some uncomfortable experiences that she encountered while she was in

secondary school. The first involved one of her teachers in middle school who cried in class the

day after Barack Obama was elected as president, because she was "really mad about it." She

also recalls one of her teachers in history class asking students "Who is the best president we've

ever had?" Shelby raised her hand and when the teacher called on her, she said "Obama." The

teacher responded by saying "Wrong. It was Ronald Reagan." While Shelby said that she never

personally felt targeted at her school, she witnessed discrimination against African American students and felt uncomfortable "around certain things that were being done." Shelby says that Burris High School was more diverse than Weston Elementary school, where she studied until she finished eighth grade, but "it was very White."

Lisa

Lisa's experience in middle school was particularly interesting because she was originally being bullied, but that dynamic changed when she became one of the star players on the basketball team which was not very good. She attended Terraville Middle School, which was a STEM magnet program, located in a low-income region of the city where she grew up. Lisa would focus on engineering classes, and she recalls a distinct academic separation between the students enrolled in the STEM classes and the neighborhood kids who were primarily African American. The demographics in the magnet program leaned heavily towards White and Asian students while the rest of the school population, which was taking the standard curriculum, was predominantly African American and Hispanic. When Lisa finished the eighth grade, she attended Lincoln High School, which was prominent because of its focus on the arts. This school had similar school-wide demographics as Terraville Middle, but the classes and advanced academic programs were better integrated because the school drew pupils from multiple middle school programs as well as several regional private schools.

Lisa's parents were both college-educated so she was pushed academically from a young age, and she was identified as Academically Gifted (AG) from the time she was in second grade in elementary school. Her mother was a teacher at her elementary school and made sure that she was tested for the AG program. When she received her test results, she was placed in the AG program and continued to thrive in the advanced academic track all the way through high school

where she took a large number of AP courses. Lisa was very aware of school politics and policies while she was in secondary school, and she remembers her middle school counselor who was an African American woman who "was wonderful because "she made sure to look out for black and brown kids." This experience was in sharp contrast to her recollections of the counselors at Lincoln High School who were mostly middle-aged White women (3 of 4 counselors) and "loved the preppy White kids" to the neglect of some of her "friends who did not receive adequate college counseling." Lisa felt that she was not hurt by this bias, because her parents were helping her to navigate her educational journey and she was also privy to the benefits of being on the AP academic track. Lisa recalls several of her "black female friends" being "pushed more into community college" by these counselors, although some of her classmates pushed back and reiterated their desire to attend four-year colleges.

Lisa was not only able to take a wide range of AP courses, but she was also able to take college-level classes from the district's career center. Interestingly, Lisa readily acknowledged that her family's resources allowed her to fully access this curriculum, because transportation was limited to a single bus and students whose schedules were not aligned around the bus schedule could not take the courses on this campus. Lisa did not recall CCR terminology being widely used at either Terraville Middle School or Lincoln High School, but she was recognized as a "Jackson Scholar" and this meant college preparatory meetings and advising sessions which focused almost exclusively on college preparation. These extracurricular sessions, which were often held after-hours at Lincoln High School, included essay writing workshops which helped students with their college essays during the application process.

Anna

Anna's secondary school experience was among the most unique of all the study participants because she attended three middle schools prior to starting ninth grade at a Christian private school where she studied for two years before attending Tennetville High School. Her parents were college-educated and came to North Carolina from the North. As they settled into a new life in the state, they were disappointed by the neighborhood schools in the large city where they now lived. This would lead them to experiment with several magnet programs, during Anna's middle school education, as they became better acquainted with the school district. Anna is also the youngest of four siblings, and her older brothers and sisters all went to college, providing her with additional resources when she began to make decisions about her own higher education pathway. In addition to this wealth of knowledge about the college admissions process, Anna also benefited from a strong affinity for reading which would be beneficial in both high school and college.

Anna's passion for reading was nurtured by both her family and one of her middle school teachers who would provide her with additional books and reading lists. She met this teacher while she was participating in the Accelerated Reading Program and this experience with reading stuck with Anna as she continued her education, and continued to develop a passion for written texts. During secondary school she felt that her English classes helped to prepare her for college the most, especially since she "learned to read a lot of dense and intense stuff like theses and dissertations" which many students tend to skim. Despite this advantage in reading skills, Anna did not get tracked into the highest academic level in high school, because the school required two successful years of honors classes before students could enroll in AP coursework, and her private school transcripts did not indicate this. Tennetville High School had three academic

tracks, which is typical of North Carolina High Schools, and they included the regular, honors, and AP levels of rigor. When Anna applied to college, she "wanted to go to this particular university, but that didn't work out" so she enrolled in a community college, for a couple years, before transferring into a four-year program. Her disappointment was hard to swallow since she believed that she had "done everything right" in terms of course selection and academic achievement.

Tennetville High School is a small charter school and there were only fifty students in Anna's graduating class. Due to this small student population, which was predominantly White, there was only one guidance counselor with whom she had minimal contact. Anna recalls a lack of diversity in the AP track, and she cannot remember a single "Black or Brown student in those classes," despite their presence in the honors courses. When asked if this raised any red flags for her she said "I think I knew like one girl who was black that was in like an AP history class, but that was it." One of the primary reasons that Anna enrolled at Tennetville High School was because her older siblings had gone to school there, and they enjoyed the hands-on projects and experiential learning experiences that were available. Anna played soccer during high school, and was a member of the Bible Study Group, as well as the Comic Book Club. These extracurricular activities kept her engaged in campus life, and provided a fun release from academics during high school. She does not recall explicit mentions of CCR, but said that the teachers at Tennetville High School would often say that they were preparing the students for college, or that they needed to improve their writing since their "professors won't accept this" and "It's going to be much harder." The most interesting thing about Anna's narrative, is that her parents were diligent about using school choice programs in her district to avoid sending her to the neighborhood Title I schools which they believed were inadequate for college preparation.

Despite this persistent advocacy, Anna's high school curriculum was not aligned with the AP track, and this may have impacted her negatively since she was not able to attend the university of her choice.

Beth

Beth had positive secondary school experiences, and she feels that her rewards were commensurate with her efforts, while completing grades six through twelve. While she witnessed practices that were concerning to her, she was largely insulated from them because of her academic track, and this allowed her matriculate to college without any real obstacles. Both her middle school and high school were majority-minority schools, with African American students representing the largest racial category in the schools. Beth is keenly aware that her access to the social capital of her parents, combined with teachers who advocated for her, helped her successfully prepare and enroll in a four-year college.

When Beth was in the first grade, she was already a full grade ahead in terms of her reading level, and this passion for written texts would continue to provide tangible benefits for her as she continued her academic journey through both middle school and high school. When she was in middle school she was accepted into the AVID (Advancement Via Individual Determination) program, and this provided her with CCR tools which complemented her classroom instruction and allowed her to be better organized while in high school and college. Beth did not hear much CCR language outside of the AVID program, but her participation helped her gain entry in the college-preparatory track in high school where she would take honors and AP courses. The only exception to her advanced curriculum schedule was her math classes since she struggled in this subject and took the regular classes, as a consequence. Beth believes that her AP classes provided a comfortable bridge to college-level expectations, and she

feels they were "a little bit more structured, a little more strict, for lack of a better word." She argues that this was especially important in her secondary schools since many educators "don't expect students who are African American, or students of color, to kind of rise up to the standards that are initially set."

Beth felt that her English classes helped to prepare her for college the most since she was able to refine her writing skills in her high school honors classes. However, she also credits her membership in the school band, as well as her band classes, with helping her to better understand math, and also work as a team player on group projects. One of the things that she was most disappointed about in secondary school was the lack of instruction related to budgeting and personal finance. She recalls one of her teachers projecting a picture of a check on the whiteboard and asking the students who could fill it out. Beth was the only student in the classroom who was familiar with checks, and this was because she had been paying attention to her parents when they were paying the household bills. When she arrived at college and started to have conversations with other students from around the state, she realized that her experience was a bit unusual since many of her new friends had taken elective classes that offered financial training while still in high school. She also wishes that her high school had more resources for remediation in math, since this would have helped her improve her skills so that she could have taken more demanding math classes before college.

During her high school enrollment, Beth recalls three primary sources of CCR information and training that were available for students. The first was through the AVID program which only had selected students included in its membership. However, due to the success of some of the AVID strategies, the school started to promote some of the concepts schoolwide for the benefit of all pupils, without regard for their academic track. These strategies

were primarily focused on note-taking systems, and organized study habits which included using planners and binders to organize class materials. The other programs, which aligned themselves with CCR, were the Middle College and Upward Bound Programs which both involved interactions with local colleges and universities. Aside from these programs, which had limited openings for students, Beth says that CCR was not generally discussed at her high school, and this may have contributed to the early withdrawal from college, by some of her friends, who left at the end of the first semester or after their first year.

Beth was complimentary of the guidance counselors at her high school who "were actually great about talking to us early on about, you know, applying for colleges." In addition, these counselors advocated for the students by encouraging them to apply to multiple schools, including programs that might have seemed out of their reach, since they wanted them to see "what exceeding expectations can do." Beth says that they even helped to walk some of the students who had not seriously considered going to college through the whole process, including filling out the FAFSA, so that they were accepted into post-secondary programs. Beth felt that all of them were knowledgeable and understood the gaps in information and resources that many of the students had, but were prepared to help bridge these gaps successfully. She noted that the majority of their high school counselors were young African American women, but all of them advocated for the students at the school with fidelity. There appeared to be a high level of continuity between her middle school and high school because they were located next to each other on the same street, and the demographics were largely consistent across campuses as a result.

Heather

Heather's secondary school experiences were filled with frustrations over racial issues which seemed to frame her memories, and had new meanings due to her new interpretations of the events through the lens of a college student. Her schools were predominantly White until she entered middle school, where she attended a public charter school which served grades K-8 on the campus. When she advanced to high school, she attended Lincoln High (see figure 15.), which is the same school that Lisa attended in an affluent neighborhood. She continued to notice patterns of discrimination and microaggressions, which targeted students of color, and these experiences would lead her to study African American and African Diaspora Studies as an undergraduate minor in college.

One of Heather's most frustrating experiences in school was being accused of cheating, on a standardized test, when her scores in some of the areas were better than all of her counterparts. The teacher even went so far as calling her mother to discuss her suspicions with her. Heather was irritated by this experience, but she says that it was typical of the discrimination that was experienced by students of color who often had to suffer the indignity of having drug dogs sniffing their lockers and personal belongings. In addition to these inconveniences, she saw differential applications of the dress code, which caused tremendous friction with the students of color. One of her AP teachers was an African woman, and the White students were extremely critical of her, and this caused discomfort for Heather since she felt that her classmates were targeting her because of her race. The students even went so far as mocking the teacher's West-African name, when she was not in the classroom. Heather's defense mechanism involved turning inward and keeping as quiet as possible in this classroom,

despite her affinity for the teacher. She describes feeling "invisible" because of the harassment of the teacher, and her consequent loss of agency.

Heather started on a career track in high school, when she completed her CNA licensure prior to graduation. While she did not work as a CNA later, the experience was still meaningful because of her desire to pursue a career in medicine. She believes that her English and math classes helped her in college, but she expressed a concern that too few practical classes are being taught in secondary schools. In particular, she would like to see more applied math courses, which help students with their finances and budgeting, so that they are better able to transition into adulthood. While in high school she was able to take a sociology course, and this helped fuel a passion for the discipline, which has become part of her undergraduate program. Heather took several AP courses in high school, even though she almost lost her place in the advanced track while in middle school, because she intentionally bombed a placement exam. She did this because she had just seen the Queen Latifa *Beauty Shop* movie and she impulsively wanted to be a beautician. She took the exam again in the spring and this time she performed well because she realized that it would be advantageous to have access to the advanced curriculum since she was now interested in pursuing a medical career. When asked how she knew that the placement exam could determine her academic trajectory, she responded "So, you wanna hear something funny? So, I figured it out from watching an episode of the Simpsons."

During Heather's senior year, she had a startling incident with her guidance counselor who was an older Caucasian woman. They had always had a rapport and the counselor was on her computer looking at HBCUs that Heather was interested in. According to Heather, when one of the school pictures was framed on the screen, her counselor said either the word Negro, or the N-word, and the counselor tried to quickly make amends. Heather says that the uncomfortable

111

moment passed quickly, because of their rapport, but later in the year their relationship soured

because Heather felt that her counselor did not believe that she was going to be able to get into a

"pretty good school." Heather said, "that's when I think my feelings that I had towards her as

my guidance counselor, slash advisor, changed." Heather was especially frustrated, at this point,

because there was only one guidance counselor at her school, who was African American, and

she felt that she would have received more aggressive advocacy if she had been assigned to work

with her. Heather noted that during her entire secondary school journey, she only had four

teachers of color and she attributes this dynamic to the advanced academic track that she studied

under. While there were other teachers of color in her school, they were rarely teaching in the

advanced courses.

David

Much like Anna, David attended an unusually large number of schools during grades six

through twelve. David would spend time on two separate middle school campuses, to complete

grades six through eight, and then a total of three high schools to complete his secondary school

education prior to enrolling in college. While this pattern appears to be suggestive of housing

insecurity, or employment instability on the part of his parents, there was only one district move

during these six years of schooling. That move occurred after he had started high school in the

first district, where he attended the two middle schools. After his freshman year of high school,

David would move to the neighboring district where he would enroll in a magnet school, called

Sandhills High School, which offered a biotechnology curriculum. He would later move from

Sandhills to a more traditional high school program, at Plover High School, from which he

would graduate. One of the primary reasons for this transfer, was that Plover High School had a

health science cluster and this allowed him to complete his CNA certification so that he could

work as a nurse's aide, and gain experience while studying a pre-medicine curriculum as an undergraduate in college.

David credits his parents, and several of his teachers, for sparking his interest in college and preparing him to enroll in a pre-medicine program. From the time he was young, his parents told him that he was going to college, and in middle school he became interested in medicine because he enjoyed his seventh-grade biology class so much. His father encouraged him to pursue a career in healthcare, because of the abundance of jobs and the consequent job security. When David was in high school, he also ran into several teachers at Plover High School who encouraged him to join HOSA (Health Occupations Students of America) and continue his journey with medicine and healthcare. His health sciences teacher supported him emotionally, as he completed the requirements for his CNA license, and he competed in the CNA competency category in the state HOSA competition. There, he received recognition for making it to the national competition. Her support was crucial because "she was kind of like a second mom," who filled the void left by the absence of his mother, who was living in another state over a thousand miles away. David feels that his secondary school math classes helped to prepare him for college, but his English classes were too focused on abstract works written in Old English which he had difficulty understanding and relating to. He enjoyed the AP courses he took, while studying on the college preparatory track in high school, and the only course he recalls taking that was not in the advanced curriculum was discrete math.

David felt frustrated in high school because he was not fluent in Spanish, even though he was a first-generation Mexican American, who looked Hispanic in the eyes of strangers. When he was younger, he ran into a Spanish teacher who scolded him for not be able to speak back to her in Spanish, and he avoided taking Spanish language classes for this reason. When he was in

113

high school, at Sandhills and Plover, the Spanish teachers were non-native speakers, and this appeared to explain their patience with him as he learnt his mother's primary language. During his senior year he worked full time while attending high school, and he was still able to maintain an "A" average. He regrets this experience, however, since he believes that he "never effectively learned how to study, and that is partly due to the fact that high school was almost too easy." When he started college, he did not feel adequately prepared, and he feels this hurt him academically during his first semester when he received the first "D" grades that he had ever received in his life. He recalls hearing his secondary school teachers mention college preparedness frequently, and this was also a recurring theme in the HOSA program.

Ben

As a first generation Mexican American, Ben has unique insights about the experiences of students of color because his fair skin provided him with "the privileges of being a White passing individual" for his "whole life." Ben's racial and cultural self-awareness was surprising, since he recalls many experiences during his life when this privilege benefitted him while excluding others who may have been just as worthy. Ben credits the social capital provided by his White mother, who graduated from college, for setting him on a college bound pathway and assisting him with the college admissions process. His high school guidance counselor was also instrumental since he assisted him throughout the process and was very frank about Ben's personal responsibilities, and the opportunities that were available if he worked hard. Ben strongly feels that his course selections, including participation in the Spanish Immersion Program and playing in his high school orchestra, were instrumental in setting him on a college bound trajectory.

When Ben was in elementary school, his parents applied for his admission to the district's Spanish Immersion Program which would guide his curriculum track all the way through high school graduation. Ben noticed that the Spanish Immersion Program host schools were all "lower income schools" and he believes this was strategic since it helped the schools to improve their test scores because of the higher academic performance of the program participants. He was also concerned that "some of the resources that were available to the Spanish Immersion students in elementary, as well as middle school, were not available to the rest of the student population." What struck Ben the most about this practice was that most of the Caucasian students in these lower income neighborhood schools were enrolled in the Spanish Immersion program and the teachers in the whole school treated them as privileged, as a consequence. Ben notes that this disparity of treatment and access to resources "created a tension between the [Spanish Immersion] students" and the rest of the students in school who were in the "traditional learning" program. Ben also felt that his orchestra classes prepared him socially for college, since the band conducted fundraisers and took trips out of town for competitions, and this expanded his worldview.

Ben expressed concerns about his level of preparation for college since he does not feel that his high school curriculum prepared him for some of the more practical challenges of going to college. These challenges included cooking, home maintenance, and financial management skills which could be as mundane as using a banking app to track funds, or transferring money between accounts. He specifically cited his Honors Marine Biology, Honors Environmental, IB World History, and orchestra classes for providing specific college preparatory skillsets because of the teachers who set up their classes to prepare students for college, or served as resources when students had questions about postsecondary education. He expressed disappointment that

115

nobody told him about the "Rule of 15," which would practically guarantee graduation from college in four years, before he enrolled in his university. This was frustrating to him because he changed majors during his senior year in college, but he did not realize that this would add additional time to complete his bachelor's degree. During his secondary education, the references to CCR were not formal but were usually expressed by teachers in terms of what colleges might expect from students. Ben articulated an interesting insight when he said that he noticed his friends who "took more CTE classes, or took more vocational classes, who you know either happened to be on a not AP/Honors track…didn't go to four-year universities, and they're doing just fine right now." This statement was telling because it captures the societal angst that is now occurring, because many trades now offer a higher level of compensation than entry level positions for people with bachelor's degrees.

Summary

The study participants had a wide range of experiences, during their secondary schooling in North Carolina, and this was reflected in their recollections during the interviews that were conducted with them. While the study sample did not incorporate the voices of Native American students, the study participants were far from being homogenous (see Table 2.) in terms of their demographics and educational backgrounds. David and Anna were outliers in that they both attended an unusually large number of schools during the seven-year span between leaving elementary school and graduating from high school. One area of relative convergence, in terms of the demographic traits of the study participants, was educational attainment since only three individuals had not completed their bachelor's degrees at the time the second-round interviews were being conducted. Four of the eleven study participants identified themselves as being first-generation college students, and this was a source of personal pride for them. The "Highest

Education" column is not conclusive, regarding the educational accomplishments of the study participants, since several participants were already enrolled in graduate studies and others voiced a desire to continue their educations in the near future.

Table 2. Study Participants' Demographics

Participant Name	Race/Ethnicity	Gender	First Generation College?	Number of Secondary Schools Attended	Highest Education
Jenna	B	F	No	3	BD*
James	A	M	Yes	2	HS
Sam	B	M	Unknown	2	AD
Sarah	B	F	Yes	3	GD
Shelby	H	F	Yes	2	HS
Lisa	B	F	No	2	BD
Anna	B	F	No	4	BD*
Beth	B	F	Unknown	2	BD*
Heather	B	F	No	2	HS
David	H	M	Yes	5	BD
Ben	H	M	Unknown	2	HS

***Codes: Race/Ethnicity = Black (B), Hispanic (H), Middle Eastern (A)
Gender = Female (F), Male (M)
Highest Education = High School (HS), Associates (AD), Undergraduate (BD), Master's Degree (GD)
BD* = undergraduate degree conferred during study (after first interview, but prior to second)

CHAPTER V: THE VISUAL LANDSCAPES

All twenty-eight of the secondary schools in North Carolina, that were attended by the study participants, were visited after the first-round interviews were conducted. After the interviews were transcribed, the school names and addresses were tabulated, and they were placed on a North Carolina map in order to determine the most efficient travel routes for making visits to all of the school campuses. Roughly half of the schools were within a one-hour travel radius from my home community, but the other half of the participant's schools were arranged in the outer ring which extended as far as four hours away from our residence. Two overnight driving trips were scheduled in order to visit the most distant schools, which were near the Atlantic coast and the mountains near the Tennessee border. One of the unexpected benefits of these campus visits, was that I was provided the opportunity to visit regions of North Carolina which I was previously unfamiliar with.

When the project was conceived, I had imagined that I would take ample photographs of each school, with numerous vantage points which would provide me with a firm understanding of the physical nuances of each school campus. This would not be the case, however, since many school campuses are only accessible from public easements (sidewalks, etc. surrounding the school), and I was composing my still shots in a manner would not identify the schools by name. These spacial constraints limited my visual access to the school campuses, and as a consequence, many of the photographs are taken from a distance which prevents close examination of the campus features. Another challenge, which was not foreseen, was the season during which many of the school campuses were photographed. Originally, the campus visits were going to be conducted during the summer, but due to a prolonged delay in receiving IRB approval, the pictures could not be taken until late fall. This impacted the contrast on the

negatives, since many of the days were cloudy and overcast, and this was reflected in some of the developed prints which were visually bland. The prints were then scanned and the additional layers of image manipulation impacted the visual quality of some of the photographs.

I had originally envisioned taking photographs of the communities in which the schools were situated, in order to provide a visual context for the location and space of each school. Unfortunately, the ethical considerations were problematic for me, and this was highlighted at one of the first campuses that I visited, which was in an urban setting. Jamison Arts School was surrounded by run-down houses, and the neighborhood appeared to be economically distressed. I considered taking pictures to highlight the contrast between the promises offered by the school, and the apparent dearth of economic opportunities offered in this part of the city. However, I personally felt that this would represent a kind of voyeurism, which could be viewed as an additional exploitation of a vulnerable population which was already being marginalized by mainstream society. This was especially true since the streets surrounding the school were filled with people who were living out their daily routines, and this would have made it impossible to avoid capturing them in the eye of my camera lens. Some of the people would have been caught in unflattering scenes, including portrayals of homelessness and other forms of vulnerability, and this was ethically problematic. In this moment, I made a decision that would impact the rest of the photographs, since the scope of the visual landscapes would now be limited to relatively sterile photographs of school buildings, without any additional visual context or framing. If boundaries were being set in the busy streets and neighborhoods of the city, then a similar approach would be used in the suburbs and the countryside. The privacy and dignity of people who were in the proximity of the schools that I was studying, but who had not consented to be participants in my research study, had to be respected.

119

This chapter will not only visually introduce the North Carolina schools, which were attended by the study participants, but will also present information that was gleaned from their websites and other publicly accessible information. The combination of photographs and data about the school's aspirations and goals, will hopefully provide a warmer picture of each school's unique personality, and its positionality with respect to CCR curriculum. While the self-imposed limitations on the visual access, to both the schools and their communities, is a limiting factor for the reader, the researcher benefitted tremendously from being present in these spaces. In addition, visiting the schools was beneficial for developing a rapport with the study participants, as well as verifying the credibility of their narratives.

Jenna's Secondary Schools

Jenna attended a total of three schools during her secondary studies, and this included a magnet program for middle school, an early college for her first two years of high school, and finally a traditional high school during her eleventh and twelfth grade years. Her middle school was a magnet school with a focus on the arts, and her high school curriculum was college preparatory, so Jenna took AP courses to prepare for enrolling in an Environmental Engineering program in college. Two of her most memorable academic experiences in high school involved the Science Olympiad, where she won an award for a research paper she wrote on the county water system, and her participation in mock trials for her Law and Justice class.

Woodburn Arts Magnet

According to the Woodburn Arts Magnet website, the school is a "learning community" that "is committed to being a premiere 6-12 school for the arts by working together." (Woodburn Arts Magnet, 2022, *About Us,* para. 2). The school emphasizes that it offers elective courses in eight distinct arts disciplines, in addition to the typical secondary school curriculum.

Admission to Woodburn Arts Magnet is determined by lottery and students are entered in the lottery after they have submitted a completed application (Woodburn Arts Magnet, 2022). Admission to the high school is competitive and based upon the outcome of an "audition process" which "includes a written application, short interview, demonstration of ability level in selected arts area and teacher recommendations." (Woodburn Arts Magnet, 2022, *About Us,* para. 5). CCR is mentioned in several locations on the school's website in the context of access to community college course, which are available for free to accepted students in grades 11 and 12. Students can either take college courses, which are guaranteed to transfer into the UNC system, or they can work on a certification in one of the technical programs that are offered.

The school is located in an urban environment, but the campus is large enough to provide a buffer from the city in which it is located. The main building features red brick construction and it has an addition which was constructed from sand-colored bricks and stucco. The exterior of the building is well maintained but the parking lots are in slight disrepair with cracks and grass growing through the asphalt. The landscaping is attractive despite the uneven nature of the turf that forms the lawns. It appears that the local community is proud of the school but does not have the resources to provide additional attention to the upkeep of the grounds. This discrepancy between the building's appearance and the surrounding grounds appears to be typical of most public schools visited in North Carolina. This is probably due to a lack of funding which is manifested in a failure to address cosmetic issues, which are a lower priority in most school systems.

Figure 2. Woodburn Arts Magnet

City Heights Early College

Like Woodburn Arts Magnet, the City Heights Early College campus is located in an urban environment, but in a different city. The school's classrooms and offices are housed in a single building on a university campus, providing the high school students with exposure to life

in college. This exposure is limited, however, since the City Heights students are restricted from

interacting with the college students on the campus that surrounds them. According to Jenna,

this prohibition created tension for the high school students because they were surrounded by a

college environment but were not allowed to enjoy the same freedoms as the students enrolled at

the university. The school's handbook is very clear about these limitations since it delineates

out-of-bounds areas as follows (City Heights Early College, 2022, *City Heights Early College*

Handbook):

> Designated areas of the campus are off-limits to students unless being escorted by an
>
> authorized staff member. Parking lots, dormitories, elevators, and unauthorized areas on
>
> the second floor of Wharton Hall and the second through fourth floor of Graham Hall are
>
> **OFF LIMITS AT ALL TIMES.** (p. 18)

The City Heights Early College staff and administration clearly did not want the high school

students attending parties, or dating students from the university, and restricting their access to

the campus surrounding the Early College helped them to control these social interactions which

were deemed inappropriate for high school students.

While the school website did not specifically mention CCR, it did allude to it in its

Mission, Vision, and Value (Purpose) statements. The school mission statement says that the

City Heights Early College "will provide an interdisciplinary approach using critical thinking to

solve real world issues in a STEM problem-based, learning environment" while the vision

statement says that the school "will provide a safe, supportive, challenging, and collaborative

learning environment that will prepare students to undertake the global issues of the future."

(City Heights Early College, 2022, *City Heights Early College Handbook*, p. 2). These

statements are well aligned with the CCR goals of preparation for college matriculation, as well

as careers in the industries of the future, and the early college experience provides the steppingstone that is beneficial to ensure that students can successfully transition to life in college (Hooker & Brand, 2010).

The City Heights Early College campus shares building space with the university with which it is academically affiliated, and the school is wholly contained in the glass faced building shown in Figure 3. However, the building is attached to surrounding campus buildings (Figure 3., second photograph) and this would explain the concerns that the school staff had with regards to their students mixing with colleges students, who were in classrooms and buildings that were in close proximity. The building is clean, and modern in its external appearance, and is connected to older brick buildings on its flanks, which present a contrast between older and newer forms of architecture. While the school does not share additional amenities or other spaces with the rest of the university campus, its shared location presents an image of innovation and technical advancement.

Figure 3. City Heights Early College

Arbor Village High School

The Arbor Village High School website proudly proclaims that the school is recognized and ranked in both the state of North Carolina and the nation as a whole (Arbor Village High School, 2023). The school profile indicates a 97.1% graduation rate for the 2022-2023 school year and a college matriculation rate of 94% (Arbor Village High School, 2023). The school is a large suburban school located on the outskirts of one of North Carolina's largest cities and it prides itself for its STEM programs. These programs have contributed to its designation as a "North Carolina Honor School of Excellence," which is "an honor that only a few high schools in North Carolina have achieved." (Arbor Village High School, 2023, *AVHS Facts*, para.3).

The school's welcome page clearly articulates its adherence to CCR principles when it states that Arbor Village High School "is committed to engaging students in opportunities and experiences that will prepare them for future challenges, productive citizenship, higher education and a career." (Arbor Village High School, 2023, *About Our School: Welcome,* para. 1). Like

City Heights Early College, Arbor Village participates in the Career and College Promise (CCP) program which provides the opportunity for North Carolina high school students to enroll in a local community college for transfer credits and/or the opportunity to earn an associate degree (Arbor Village High School, 2023). This enhanced access to both four-year college transfer credit, as well as career and technical education, is a clear indication of CCR curriculum delivery since graduating students are being tracked for either higher education enrollment, or job placement, if they do wish to attend a four-year institution.

The Arbor Village High School campus is large and relatively modern, since it was built in the late 1990s and accommodates a student population of over two thousand (Arbor Village High School, 2023). The campus resembles a community college both because of its size and the design of its concrete and glass buildings, but the presence of yellow school buses provides a cue that it is a secondary school. The school is surrounded by developments with expensive single-family homes, but greenways provide a buffer so that the residential neighborhoods are not visible from the campus. The Arbor Village Elementary School is across the street from the high school's athletics complex and this provides a nestling of the schools within the developments, and an opportunity for students to walk to school using the greenways.

Figure 4. Arbor Village High School

James' Secondary Schools

James attended two secondary schools during grades 6-12, and they were both in the

same mountain city roughly half a mile from each other. He studied at Lowell Middle School

during grades 6-8, and moved on to Buffington High School for grades 9-12. His high school

curriculum was complemented by dual enrollment in the regional community college, and this allowed James to take classes which were not available at his high school, while also preparing him for success in a four-year college setting. His rigorous courseload, which included AP classes, as well as an array of experiential courses, met the CCR criteria for college readiness.

Lowell Middle School

Lowell Middle School is an urban school located in a small mountain city of about 12,00 residents and it is one of three public middle schools serving grades 6-8 in the community. The school is not only located near the city's only high school, but both are close to the downtown area. The school is constructed of brick with colonnades flanking its front entrance, and this embellishment provides the building with an elegant façade as well as a practical space for managing drop-off and pickup during inclement weather. The school appears to be designed in a fashion that visually links it to Buffington High School, which also features large columns that complement the red brick exterior walls. The school campus is neat and tidy, and the building's exterior is well maintained, providing indications that the city takes pride in this school.

The school website proudly states that Lowell Middle School "has earned "School of Distinction" status since the inception of the NC "ABC" Accountability Program for nine out of ten years." (Lowell Middle School, 2023, *About Us,* para. 1). This is a sign of the school's aggregate testing accomplishments, but it does not tell us much about the performance of subgroups in the school who might be underachieving due to a performance gap. The website's curriculum section discusses the "core classes consisting of Math, Language Arts, Science, and Social Studies" and it mentions elective enrichment classes like physical education, band, and other enrichment and exploratory options for students. (Lowell Middle School, 2023, *About Us,* para. 2). There is no explicit discussion of CCR curriculum discernible on the school's banner

pages, and a deeper search into nested pages was also futile. The school's district does not

appear to recognize or discuss CCR on its website either.

Figure 5. Lowell Middle School

Buffington High School

While Lowell Middle School appears to have been architecturally designed to emulate

Buffington High School, the original is grander, in both scale and classical embellishments, and

as a consequence, it is truly a community centerpiece. The school occupies an immense campus

in the center of the city, and it appears as though all roads in town lead to the school. Additions

were built onto the campus, as the student population has grown over the years, but these

additions were designed to fit seamlessly with the original campus. A close examination,

however, allows an observer to differentiate between old and new because of the aging of the red

bricks. The campus was stunning from all angles, and it was difficult to resist the temptation of

shooting a whole roll of film to capture every aspect of the school.

CCR references were not readily apparent on the Buffington High School website, but a

deeper analysis of nested web pages provided information aligned with the CCR curriculum.

The course description for pre-Calculus says "This course is designed for students pursuing

careers in STEM-related fields. Students will be prepared for Calculus, AP Calculus and any

entry-level college course." (Buffington High School, 2023, *Course Descriptions,* p. 9). The

school's website does have a link which connects to a district website that outlines "Graduation

Designations" for students at Buffington High School (Buffington High School, 2023,

Graduation Designations):

> The Board of Education recognizes the importance of setting rigorous graduation
>
> requirements to help ensure that students are receiving an education that will prepare
>
> them to be career and college ready and productive members of society. (para. 1)

This language, from the graduation requirements document, is clearly expressing CCR

curriculum requirements but it is not fore fronted on the school's website for community access.

Another surprising discover made on the school's website was the absence of school accountability data from the time period following the 2018-2019 school year. While this is not unusual, given the fact that the 2019-2020 school year had data which has been viewed skeptically by educators because of the Covid-19 crisis, the absence of data spans four school years. It also coincides with a drop in school performance from an "A" to a "B" school according to the school report card issued by the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction (North Carolina School Report Cards, 2022). The school's performance slumped considerably after the 2018-2019 school year, which is typical for schools nationwide, but it appears that the school's administration did not want to present data which conflicted with their glowing self-assessment on their homepage which states, "We are proud to be an A school based on our students' academic performance and growth." (Buffington High School, 2023, *About Us,* para. 1). The last time Buffington High School had a performance grade of an "A" was for scores tabulated at the end of the 2017-2018 school year which was five years ago (North Carolina School Report Cards, 2018).

Figure 6. Buffington High School

Sam's Secondary Schools

Sam attended two schools during grades 6-12, and both schools had recent name changes either before or after his enrollment. Plains Middle School was renamed after he moved on to Jefferson Early College, and the new name places emphasis on the creative arts. Jefferson Early College had a district-geographic name, prior to Sam's attendance, and both name changes appear to be marketing schemes aimed at increasing the attractiveness of the schools which are in a primarily urban school district. Plains Middle School is on the edge of the school district, in a rural setting, while Jefferson Early College is situated on a university campus in the heart of a large city.

Plains Middle School

Plains Middle School was recently restructured to become a magnet program serving grades 6-12, and the new name emphasizes the school's commitment to arts and technology. According to the school's website, Plains Middle School "is both a calendar magnet and a theme

magnet" since it operates "on a year round schedule." (Plains Middle School, 2022, *About Us,* para. 1). There is no explicit mention of CCR on the school's website, and the "school vision is: Creativity. Communication. Collaboration. Community." (Plains Middle School, 2022, *About Us,* para. 1).). The school offers career-oriented electives including Digital Media & Design, Video Technology & Communications, Engineering, Computer Programming, Music & Audio Production, Visual Arts, and Spanish.

There are only 100 seats per grade, and enrollment is based upon lottery selection after an application for admission is submitted. One of the school's appealing characteristics is the year-long school calendar, which many families desire because of childcare challenges during the summer. The school district provides transportation from any location within the boundary of the Local Educational Agency (LEA) so students and their families are not discouraged from joining the school community because of their domicile. The school's website is poorly organized and many of the tabs provide minimal information, or no information at all.

Plains Middle School's campus is located to the north of a small community on the outskirts of the LEA's geographic boundary, and it is the "most rurally sited" of the district's public schools (Homepage for Students for Teachers Project Partners, n.d.). The campus is expansive, and covers 55 total acres of property, with 125,000 square feet of building space due to several additions made to the campus infrastructure since the school was originally opened in 1974 (Homepage for Students for Teachers Project Partners, n.d.). The single-story campus buildings are arranged in the shape of a square across the campus, and the there is ample space for students both within the buildings, and on the campus grounds, because the school enrollment is currently capped at 700 despite a previous occupancy of almost 900 students. The exterior walls are constructed of beige concrete corduroy, and the window frames are large with white

framing to provide contrast. The school's property is surrounded by woods on three sides, and large acreage residential lots face the front entrance of the school.

Figure 7. Plains Middle School

Jefferson Early College

Jefferson Early College occupies a single building in the middle of a university campus which is located in the heart of a large city in North Carolina. The school's homepage proudly announces that Jefferson Early College was a 2019 U.S. Department of Education National Blue Ribbon School (Jefferson Early College, 2022). The Early College was recognized with this prestigious award a year before the Covid-19 shutdowns, and this is noteworthy since it speaks to the school's trajectory prior to the academic disruptions caused by the pandemic. According to the U.S. Department of Education the award "recognizes outstanding public and non-public elementary, middle, and high schools based on their overall high academic achievement or success in closing the achievement gap among diverse groups of students." (National Blue Ribbon Schools, n.d., *What is The National Blue Ribbon Schools Program?* para. 1). The Early College was the only high school in North Carolina to be recognized as a National Blue Ribbon School (NBRS) in 2019, and it was one of only two North Carolina schools cited in that year. (National Blue Ribbon Schools, n.d., *Previous NBRS Awardees: NC, 2019*). In addition, further investigation on the NBRS website showed that the award was given for "high academic achievement," rather than "success in closing the achievement gap," which is even more noteworthy given the school's demographics where minoritized students are the super-majority of the student population. (National Blue Ribbon Schools, n.d., *Award Categories and Nomination Process.* paras. 1-2).

The Jefferson Early College website is loaded with CCR references which speak to its commitment to this curriculum framework. The homepage has large tabs for "College and Career Spirit Week, College Application Week," and a "College Fair for Hispanic Students/Parents" (Jefferson Early College, 2022). In addition, the secondary "Students" tab,

which linked to additional data from the homepage, included a "Career and College" page with information about college admissions, ACT and SAT exams, financial aid, high paying careers, the College Board, academic scholarships, college athletics, and the College Foundation of North Carolina (CFNC). This plethora of valuable information, for college bound high school students, is a clear indicator that Jefferson Early College is fully committed to CCR and explains why Sam said that CCR was discussed with students "practically on a daily basis." This laser like focus on college and career readiness has clearly been a factor in the school's success, at least prior to the pandemic, and helps to explain why the school was nationally recognized for its high academic achievement in 2019.

The school's building is a regal four-story brick structure which is topped with a cupola that adds a flair of elegance. While the building is clearly older, it appears to be well maintained and may have been one of the university's original classroom buildings. It is located on the periphery of the arcing circular driveway which leads to the main campus administrative buildings, so it is conveniently located for guest parking. Due to its location, and its separate structure, the Jefferson Early College is clearly separated from the rest of the university campus and this likely minimizes interactions between the high school and college students. All of the classes that the Early College students take, appear to be provided in the single school building, and this is substantiated by Sam's comments that they were only offered certain classes which were part of their standard curriculum, and they could not take other college-level classes that they wanted.

Figure 8. Jefferson Early College
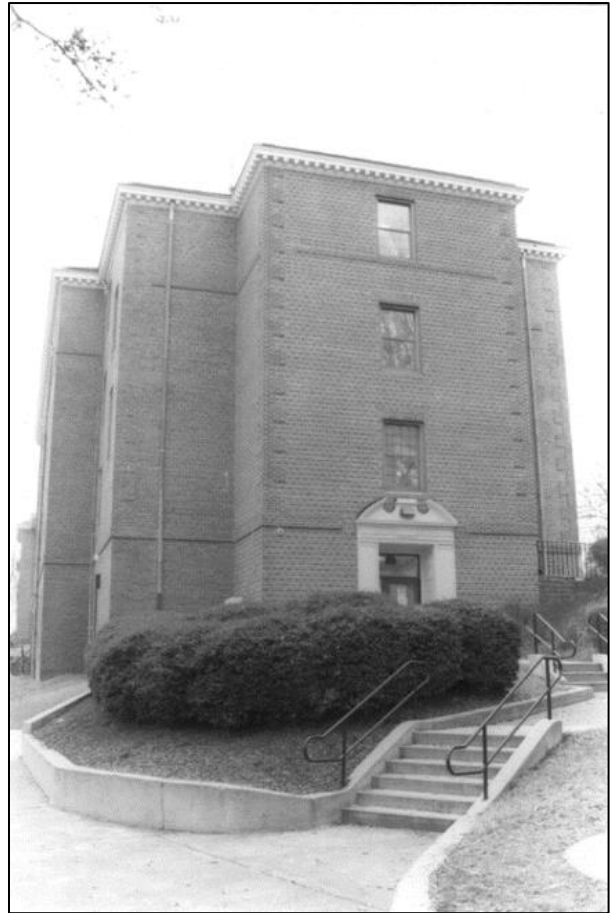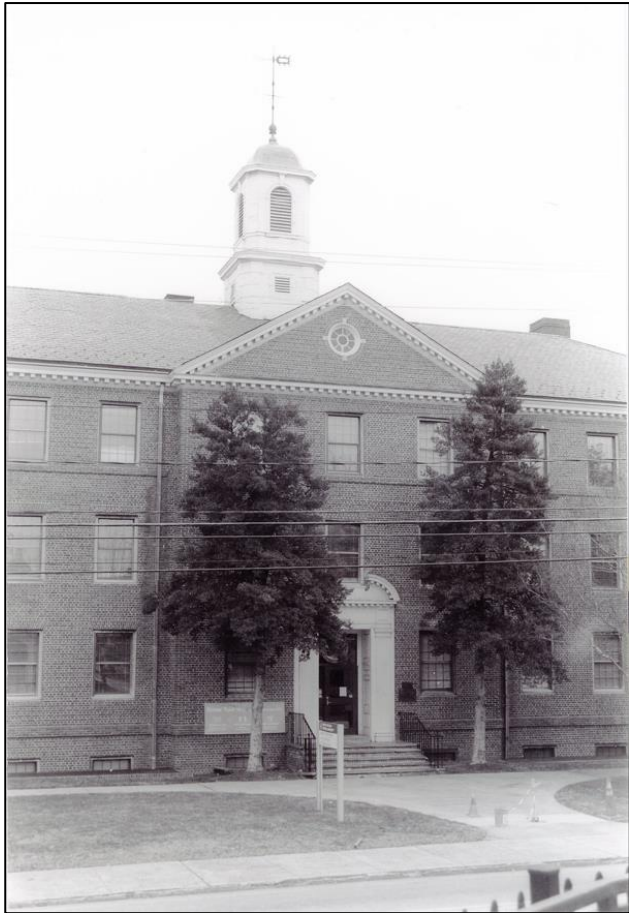
Sarah's Secondary Schools

Sarah's secondary schooling was spread across three schools, one of which was outside

of the community to which her family relocated after leaving a northeastern state. She attended

Lesterview Middle School for seventh grade, where she experienced a dramatic culture shock

because of the differences between the southern schools and the single K-8 school she attended

before her family moved. Her family moved to a larger city, away from the coast, during her

eighth-grade year, and she attended Maverick Middle School before returning to the city where

she attended Lesterview. She completed her high school studies at Washington High School

where she took several AP courses during her junior and senior years as well as completing her licensure to work as a CNA.

Lesterview Middle School

Lesterview Middle School is located on the periphery of a city, which is relatively close to the Atlantic Coast, and the school borders a busy highway. The school property is difficult to enter or exit due to the high speed of cars travelling the state highway, and the congestion that builds up from the traffic lights at the corner of the campus. Businesses line the road on the opposite side of the highway, from the school campus, and they include insurance companies, a medical clinic, a U-Haul center, and a veterinary clinic. Another middle school is located on the opposite side of the highway, about a fifth of a mile to the north. This is peculiar because the schools are so close to each other, but it is obvious that the six-lane highway is a zonal boundary, and the schools serve separate communities to the east and west of the highway. To the north of Lesterview's campus, on the same side of the highway, is a large shopping center which includes a Home Depot and other big box retailers. Both schools are situated in a commercial district of the city and Lesterview is only approachable by foot, from a street to the south of the campus, which provides access to a residential area. Unfortunately, this street does not have sidewalks and it would be dangerous for students to either walk or bicycle to school. On the south side of the campus, across this same street, is a fast-food restaurant with large signs on the doors which say, "Only two students permitted in the building at the same time." Clearly, the restaurant does not want to provide a hangout for young people, on their way home from school, and this is consistent with the rest of the neighborhood which provides an unwelcoming environment for students.

The Lesterview Middle School website does not have any CCR information available on either the homepage or other banner page tabs. There is implicit CCR language in both the school's Mission and Vision statements which are only available on the fifth page of the school's student code of conduct. Unlike most school websites, which provide the Vision and Mission statements in the "About Us" tab, Lesterview's administration did not forefront this information for public consumption. The vision statement says that "Every student will have equitable access to engaging learning that prepares them to be competitive, collaborative, and successful in our global world," and this echoes the CCR language that many schools use to describe career readiness (Lesterview Middle School, 2022, *Student Code of Conduct,* p. 1). The Mission statement suggests that "Smith County Schools will provide a safe, positive, and rigorous learning environment to prepare lifelong learners to reach their maximum potential." (Lesterview Middle School, 2022, *Student Code of Conduct,* p. 1). Again, this reference to CCR is indirect since it never mentions college readiness, although it alludes to higher education opportunities with the "rigorous learning environment" and "lifelong learners" language. Sarah's comments about the pervasiveness of military culture on the campus, were supported by the school's "Military Connections" tab which is accessible from the "Our Parents and Community" tab on the homepage. This military resource page is more prominent on the website than either the Vision or Mission statements, although the bland school motto "We Expect Success and Nothing Less" is visible on the homepage (Lesterview Middle School, 2022, *LMS Welcome Message,* p. 1). A definition of success would be useful, in terms of setting expectations for students at the school.

Figure 9. Lesterview Middle School
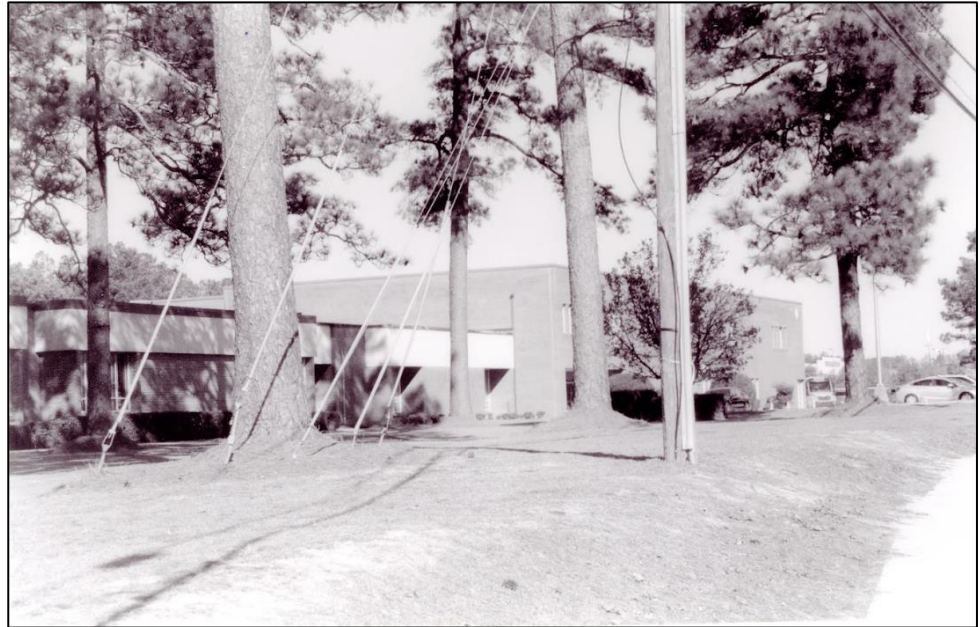
Maverick Middle School

This school campus is located on the outside perimeter of a large city, in a commercial district that is a considerable distance from the city center. Therefore, Maverick Middle School has the geographical appearance of a suburban rather than an urban school, because of the streets

and businesses which are in close vicinity to the campus. The school building sits on a hill, with a large sloping lawn that extends towards the street access to the campus. The campus is landscaped in an attractive manner with many large trees and shrubs, which provide natural beauty despite the urban setting. The school campus has the appearance of a suburban school which is in a residential neighborhood, but this belies the fact that the school is surrounded by commercial buildings on three sides, and borders a busy six lane boulevard to the west. There is a reprieve on the eastern side of the campus where there is a transition to a residential neighborhood, and sidewalk access for students who are walking to school.

The Maverick Middle School website provides considerable information about its institutional objectives, and these are clearly aligned with CCR. The mission statement claims that Maverick Middle School "will engage student learners in rigorous and relevant learning opportunities founded in collaboration, communication, critical thinking, and creativity, and enhanced by a focus on meaningful technology and Covey's 7 habits" (Maverick Middle School, 2023). While this statement does not mention careers and college admissions directly, it cites many of the components of CCR and is unique due to its expansive reference to Stephen Covey's 7 Habits of Highly Effective People, which are explained in detail on the schools "Our Magnet Theme" tab. The "Principal's Letter" summarizes Maverick Middle School's mission, vision, and values statements with the goal that "students will be happy, healthy, resilient problem-solvers who are college and career ready" (Maverick Middle School, 2023, *Our School: Principal's Message,* para. 8). In addition to the principal's letter there are numerous web pages dedicated to advanced academic options for high school including early college programs and magnet specialty schools. The weekly principal's letter also encourages eighth grade students, and their parents, to attend an upcoming Early College Fair which is being held on the campus of

141

the district's College and Career Academy. Maverick Middle School clearly embraces the CCR

curriculum guidelines, and is intentional in its goals for college and career preparation.

Figure 10. Maverick Middle School
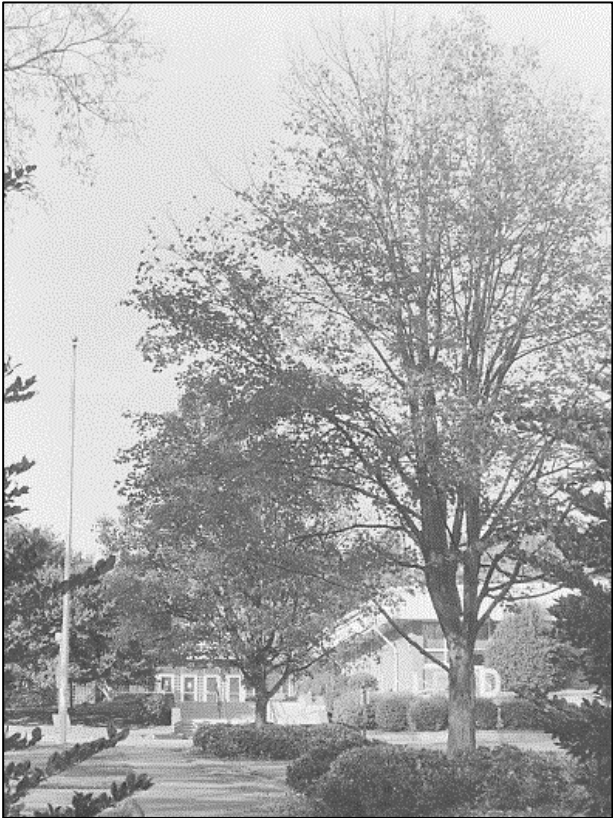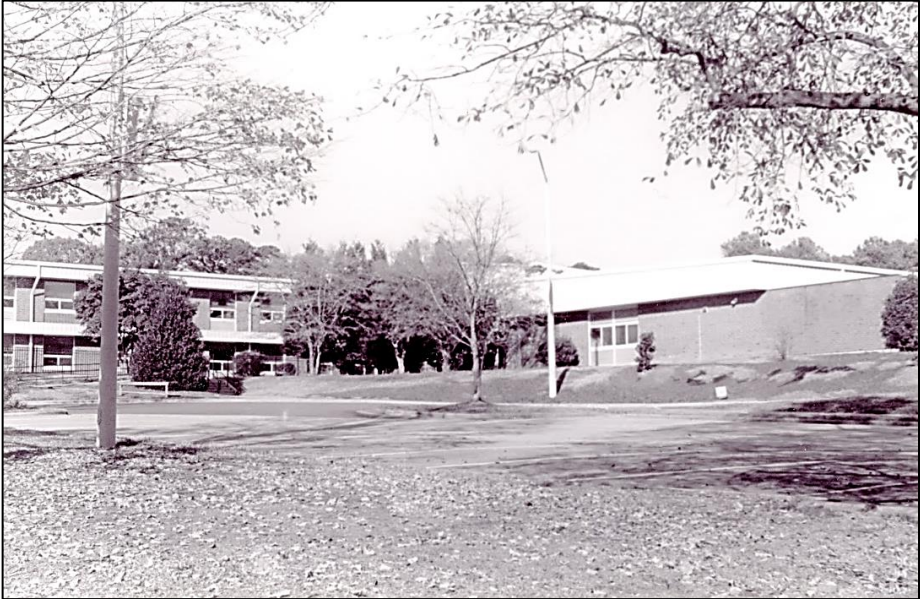
Washington High School

Washington High School is located in the same city as Lesterview Middle School, and it

is also located along the same busy highway about two miles south. Given the close proximity,

it is obvious that Lesterview Middle, and the other middle school that was situated across the

highway, are both feeder schools that attend Washington High. Washington High School has a

large sprawling campus, despite its urban location, and its buildings have low concrete corduroy

walls (vertically slatted) which give the school the appearance of a detention center. There are

several structures on the campus which resemble squat towers, and these contribute to the

appearance of a prison. There are few windows at the school and the campus has a minimal

number of trees decorating the campus to provide greenery. The lawns were not well maintained

and red dirt was as common as grass on the front approaches. When I spoke to one of the

assistant principals, she told me that the principal (who was not available) would have to give me

permission to take pictures of the campus. I reminded them that I had a legal right to take

pictures from the public thoroughfares that were outside of the campus, and she then said that I

could go ahead and do that. The whole dialogue was surprising since I had presented both my

academic credentials, as well as my own assistant principal's picture identification from the

Alamance Burlington School System. This was the only school at which staff presented

obstacles for photographing the campus, although I presented credentials on several campuses

across the state. My final impression was that the school staff did not have much operational

freedom, and that the school principal was controlling most of the decision-making at the school.

Since the principal was not available, the assistant principal was clearly reluctant to get into

trouble for giving me permission to photograph the campus. I was able to take the necessary

pictures from the public sidewalks, that bordered the highway, despite the inconvenience and delay.

Washington High School's website was similar Lesterview Middle School, and this was because the district used a template with similar graphics, tabs, and picture frames. Individual schools differentiated the sites with their own pictures and information located on the tabs, but all of the websites looked similar and were linked to common district information. The only CCR information available on the website was a banner for College Application Week, but there were no resources being provided, only the admonition that "Application fees to a majority of colleges will be waived. Take advantage of this opportunity and apply to as many colleges as you can" (Washington High School, 2022, *College Application Week*). This lackluster support for assisting students with the admissions process was informational at best, but provided nothing tangible for students who needed assistance with the application process itself. The "Homepage Welcome" banner provided school information which included many bizarre phrases like "Committed to preparing our students to conquer the future" and "Our students are ambitious, enthusiastic, and motivated. We challenge them to become winners." (Washington High School, 2022, *WHS Homepage Welcome,* paras. 2-3). Military support information was located on a tab on the homepage, and there were tabs for the Air Force Reserve Officer Training Corps (ROTC) and the Junior ROTC (JROTC) for high school students. The information on the school website does not seem to advocate for CCR, and at best it appears to aggressively promote a career in the military as a viable alternative to college enrollment.

Figure 11. Washington High School

Shelby's Secondary Schools

Weston Elementary School

Weston Elementary School serves grades Pre-K through eight, and it is located a short distance from the center of the town it serves, and is named after. The school is on an expansive campus, in what feels like the countryside, because of the small size of the community in which

145

it is located. The school is attractive, and the campus grounds are well maintained. According to Shelby the middle school is located on a wing that is attached to the rest of the school building, creating a bit of separation from the younger students. Shelby recalls:

> It was a little weird because if you're a kindergartener, you're going to the same school as like an eighth grader. So, it might be a little odd, because I mean there have been eighth graders that will get caught vaping in the bathrooms and they're in the same school as like a kindergartener.

From the exterior of the campus the distinction between the elementary school's classrooms, and those of the middle school, seem to be apparent. Unfortunately, this architectural separation did not seem to work very well in terms of school operations, for the reasons Shelby cited above.

The Weston Elementary School website indicates the school now enrolls students beginning in pre-kindergarten and continuing through the eighth grade. The school's website is loaded with valuable information including CCR references which are easy to find. The homepage calendar has a notation about an upcoming "STEAMA Career and College Day" and there were tabs for "STEAMA" and a "College and Career Corner" prominently accessible (Weston Elementary School, 2022). The College and Career Corner webpage has ten CCR resource tabs, and a separate welcome statement which declares "This site was created especially for our pre-K through 8th grade students and their families to help prepare and explore options for life after high school. Our goal is to provide online resources that promote awareness of, and readiness for, and access to college and career options" (Weston Elementary School, 2022, *College and Career Corner,* para. 1). This statement was surprising since it did not limit CCR to just secondary students, but all students in pre-kindergarten through eighth grade. In addition, the school mission is "to work collaboratively with the community to prepare all students for

career, college, and life success" (Weston Elementary, 2022, *School Improvement: School Improvement Plan,* para. 1). The vision statement further aligns itself with CCR objectives by stating that "The vision of Weston Elementary School, in alignment to James County Schools, is to become an exemplary school system where all students and staff excel in a globally competitive society." (Weston Elementary, 2022, *School Improvement: School Improvement Plan,* para. 2). Weston Elementary School, and the James County school district, provide excellent documentable information showing their commitment to CCR, and this is in stark contrast to Shelby's experiences at Burris High School where she found little support for her college and career planning goals.

Figure 12. Weston Elementary School

Burris High School

Burris High School is one of the larger high schools in the county and Shelby verified this when she said that several middle schools in the area fed into it. This is why her high school was more diverse than her middle school (which was also her elementary school) because students going into the ninth grade were combined with students coming from several other middle school programs. Like Weston Elementary, Burris High School is located near farmland, but it is even more rural because it is located on a campus far from the nearest town. The school building is large, and the columns which embellish its front façade give it the appearance of a college building due to its imposing height. All the classrooms appear to be contained in this singular building, but the school is clearly a source of pride for the county. The athletic facilities, including the fields, are located behind and adjacent to the classroom building and this reinforces the impression that it is a college campus. The yellow school buses, which are parked in a neat row to the left of the school, are one of the only visible signs, aside from the school

marquee, which highlight the fact that the campus serves a high school population. The fences lining the athletic fields are abundantly covered with booster signs, which provide further evidence that the community fully supports this school.

Burris High School is one of four high school campuses, in the James County School district, and it appears to be the flagship high school. An examination of the school's website was disappointing since there were no CCR references on the homepage, and the few CCR aligned statements were nested in documents which were often two or three levels removed. This stood in stark contrast to the Weston Elementary website, which was particularly impressive because of its CCR credentials. The school's student handbook opens with a letter from the principal in which he says, "These are the years that you test your driving skills, prepare for work or college, register for the Selective Service, become an educated voter, and earn your diploma." (Burris High School, 2022, *Students: Student/Parent Handbook,* p. 3). While he references CCR it appears to be secondary to driving and the only other CCR references linked to the school's homepage were related to JROTC and Career and Technical Education (Burris High School, 2022, *Programs*). Burris High School appears to prioritize working, after graduating from high school, and this review of school documents supports Shelby's assessment of the school's college application resources and minimal CCR focus. It is a bit surprising to see a greater emphasis on CCR promoted by Weston Elementary, since high school students would be expected to gain more from CCR resources, but this could be a function of the priorities of the different school leadership teams.

Figure 13. Burris High School

Lisa's Secondary Schools

Lisa attended magnet programs in both middle school and high school, but the demographics of the two campuses were very different. Terraville Middle School provided a STEM magnet program within the larger campus, in a low-income neighborhood which is

among the most economically depressed in the city. Lincoln High School, on the other hand, is located in an affluent neighborhood, and offers an arts program which draws students from across the district. While the neighborhood students at Terraville Middle come from predominantly African American and Latinx families, who would be classified as low-income, the students in the Lincoln High School neighborhood are predominantly upper middle class and White. The diversity at Lincoln is provided by students of color attending from outside the neighborhood, while the STEM program at Terraville has affluent White and Asian students attending from outside the school's proximity because of the academic magnet. In both schools, the social capital and financial resources play a role in the make-up of the students who can attend the magnet programs within the school.

Terraville Middle School

The neighborhood around Terraville Middle School is punctuated with bodegas which advertise wine, beer, and cigarettes in their limited window spaces. The campus is nestled in a small valley that is accessible from the densely populated road that is characteristic of an urban location. The school campus is old, and appears to be poorly maintained despite the prominence of its STEM program. Its location is within walking distance from a large number of closely packed residences, on the road that passes above the school, and it is clear that many of the school's students walk to the campus from their homes. The school has a covered car line walkway which provides access to the front office, from the parking lot and sidewalks, and the steep grade of the campus suggests problems with drainage during severe rainstorms. This drainage issue is even more prominent when looking at the school's athletic fields which show signs of erosion due to water flowing to lower elevations on the campus. Large oak trees grace

the campus, and while they are majestic, they date the campus because of their size and placement.

Terraville Middle School's website provides ample information supporting CCR curriculum, as evidenced by the prominent display of the mission and vision statements as well as a tab for the county's "Jackson Scholars" program which has the motto "For College. For Life." (Terraville Middle School, 2022, *Student Services Department: Jackson Scholars*). The mission statement says that Terraville Middle School "will prepare students to excel in STEM fields of study that lead to successful 21st century careers as leaders and innovators" (Terraville Middle School, 2022, *Terraville Magnet School,* para. 2). The vision statement asserts that the school "focuses on student-centered learning by providing experiences that motivate all students through a rigorous and technologically enhanced curriculum that inspires creative, critical and analytical thinking" (Terraville Middle School, 2022, *Terraville Magnet School,* para. 1). Both the mission and vision statements use CCR terminology to promote their schools and the prominence of these statements, along with the "Jackson Scholars" tab on the homepage, suggests that the school's leadership wishes to align its programs with the CCR curriculum.

The secondary web pages are also rich with CCR aligned information, and Terraville Middle School claims that it specializes in "providing a rigorous and advanced curriculum to prepare students for AP courses and admission to competitive universities." (Terraville Middle School, 2022, *Magnet & STEM Education: Why Choose Terraville,* para. 1). This adherence to a college-preparatory curriculum is strengthened by the hands-on experiential classroom environments that the school provides, in addition to the technology resources that are integrated on the campus by three regional universities. Further evidence of CCR curriculum can be found on multiple nested webpages including the Magnet Curriculum and

Clubs tabs. Unfortunately, the school does not provide equal access to its extracurricular programs, because parents are wholly responsible for transportation, and this burden is inconsistent with other programs which provide educational opportunities independent of family resources.

Figure 14. Terraville Middle School
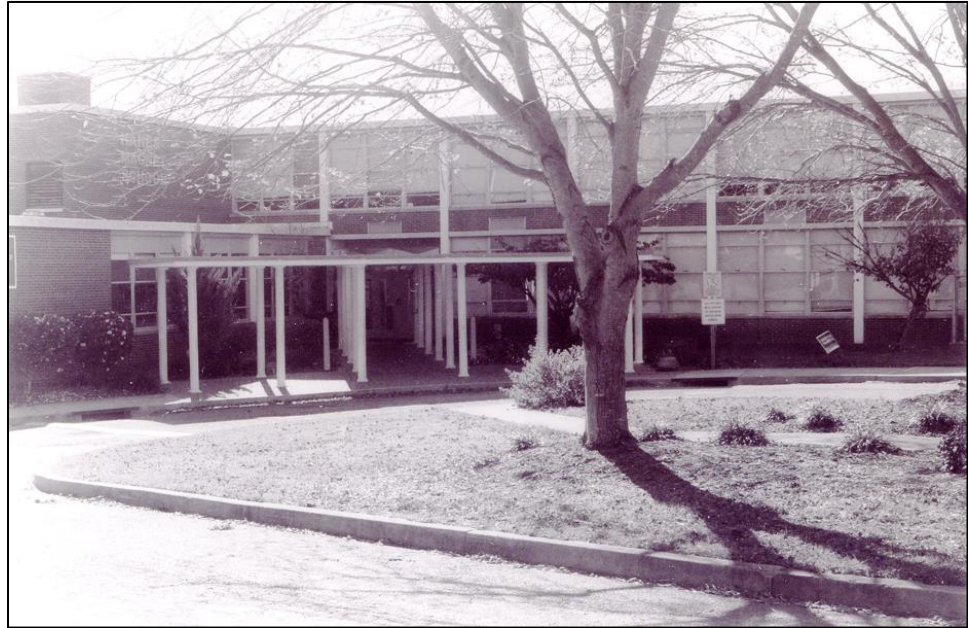
Lincoln High School

Lincoln High School's campus is located on the summit of a hill which is the setting of one of the oldest and most prestigious neighborhoods in the large North Carolina city. The school is an architectural masterpiece, and the grounds and buildings are well maintained. Much like Terraville Middle School, the campus has numerous mature trees dotting its landscape, but instead of oak trees dominating the vegetation there are numerous tree species which create a beautiful visual mosaic. The campus is in the heart of an established neighborhood and the homes which surround it are also primarily clad in red bricks, matching the façade of the school. Viewing the school's buildings from the exterior it is obvious that the school has a large student population because of the visual number of classrooms which can be seen from the street. Like Terraville, Lincoln High School is within walking distance of many residences, but there do not appear to be very many families in the neighborhood, due to the cost of the houses and the fact that many of the owners have already raised their children. The school and the houses surrounding it complement each other nicely, taking one back to the mid-20th century when a school like this was often the beacon of the community.

The school's homepage is plastered with CCR references, and this is not surprising given its role as an arts magnet campus. What is surprising however, is the school's apparent motto which is both arrogant and crass; "Lincoln High School. The place where everyone wants to be." (Lincoln High School, 2022). This statement, while partially true (not all high school students in the district want to attend), is completely insensitive to many students whose families would be grateful for the opportunity to send them to the school, but cannot because enrollment is not fully accessible to all students in the district. Students are eligible to enroll at Lincoln High if they reside in the Lincoln High School zone, have a currently enrolled sibling, or are

successfully placed by the Magnet Lottery (Lincoln High School, 2022, *About Us: Arts Magnet: Magnet Lottery FAQs,* para. 9). These policies are inequitable, and make it clear that while many students might want to attend Lincoln High, the opportunity is provided first to the highly affluent families in the zone, then to children of district staff, and siblings of students currently enrolled, and finally to students who are able to qualify through use of the random lottery. Unfortunately, this means that a student from a low-income neighborhood who attended a magnet program for both elementary and middle school could be denied entrance to Lincoln High school because it is out of their zone, and admission would be dependent upon their luck in the lottery. This magnet application process is used for all schools in the Crandall County School District, and clearly contradicts the district's promise of school choice (Crandall County School District, 2022, *Choice & Magnet Schools: Choice and Magnet Schools Frequently Asked Questions*).

The "Headlines" section of the homepage displays numerous CCR aligned tabs including ASVAB Career Exploration Program Assessment, North Carolina Governor's School, Scholarship Newsletters, and College Visits to Lincoln High (Lincoln High School, 2023). In addition, there are numerous CCR resources available on the "Student Services (Guidance)" webpage which has five tabs for college preparatory information. The mission and vision statements do not directly address CCR since they focus instead on the arts, the community, and the self-congratulatory statement dissected earlier. The mission statement says "LHS fosters an inclusive space that informs, inspires, and empowers through academics, arts, and athletics. We equip and support students to achieve their dreams." (Lincoln High School, 2022, *About Us: Vision, Mission & Values*). This mission statement is more of a statement of core values than a list of goals, and only the phrase "empowers through academics" appears to provide tentative

linkage to CCR. The vision statement is also unwieldy since it simply states that "Lincoln is the place where everyone wants to be" and this is less vision statement than a provocative brag (Lincoln High School, 2022, *About Us: Vision, Mission & Values*).

Figure 15. Lincoln High School

Anna's Secondary Schools

Anna started her secondary school journey at Jamison Arts School, which offers a well-respected arts magnet program for grades 6-12. The following year she enrolled at Vetter Middle School, followed by Gridgeview Middle School during her eighth-grade year. She attended a private Christian school for grades nine and ten, and then attended Tennetville High School to complete her secondary school studies. Information from her studies at the Christian school are not relevant to this study, but this experience appears to have impacted her academic trajectory, since she was not able to enroll in the AP track at Tennetville since the private school did not label her classes as "honors" on her transcripts. This was likely because the school did not offer multiple levels of academic rigor, due to its small size. Anna's experiences have provided her with a considerable understanding of secondary school educational practices, in diverse programs, and consequently she is able to speak with considerable authority about secondary school curriculum. Anna's journey is especially unique, not only because of the number of schools she attended, but also the fact that they were all in the same district, and in relatively close geographic proximity to each other.

Jamison Arts School

Jamison Arts School offers an arts magnet program which helps to offset some of the undesirable aspects of the urban neighborhood where it is located. The red brick building fronts a busy city street, and there is considerable noise from the traffic surrounding the campus. The school's campus is nestled into a gritty neighborhood which is characterized by homes that are largely adorned with burglar bars covering the windows. The homes lining the busy thoroughfare, on both sides, have been converted into businesses while the houses further down the side streets are being used for domiciles. This mixed-use zoning of the neighborhood has a

negative impact on the school community since there is a lot of traffic (both pedestrian and motor vehicle) to and from the small businesses. This lack of separation from the commercial community presents a clear security challenge, and the school uses a fortress design to seal its perimeter from the public. The school's front entrance is decorated with what appear to be student produced paintings which give the building a festive appearance consistent with its arts programming.

The Jamison Arts School homepage has numerous CCR related tabs that include a "College Information Virtual Parent Night," an "SAT Registration" tab, and information about an upcoming "CTE College Visit" (Jamison Arts School, n.d.). There is additional CCR information nested on the Academics tab under both the English I and English II curriculum descriptions which state that the ELA curriculum "offers core instructional materials in print and digital form that are aligned to College and Career Readiness Standards" (Jamison Arts School, n.d., *Academics: High School: English,* paras. 5-6). The Career and Technical Education page also cites CCR language stating "Through CTE, students can start their path toward a career that they are passionate about, while earning valuable experience, college credits and more." (Jamison Arts School, n.d., *Academics: Career & Technical Education,* para. 1). Despite the multiple nested explicit references to CCR, and the implicit information on the homepage, the mission, vision, and values statements, which can be found on the school's improvement plan on Indistar, are bereft of any CCR language, but have a clear focus on arts education instead. This is not surprising, however, since the school's primary objective is grade 6-12 arts education. Admission to the Jamison Arts School is competitive and scored auditions are a requirement for students who are completing the application process.

Figure 16. Jamison Arts School

Vetter Middle School

Unlike Jamison Arts School, Vetter Middle School is located in a quasi-rural section of

the city, on the periphery away from most of the commercial and residential areas. The school

was constructed of red bricks using the single-story covered walkway campus layout that is

prevalent across the state, and is also typical for California and Florida. In this regard, the campus is ordinary, but it was built on a sloping hill that is accessible from the narrow two-lane road constructed on the ridge above. While the campus appears to be in a rural setting, this is just an illusion created by the expansive nature preserve across the street. The school is surrounded by residential neighborhoods on its two sides, and there is a big box retail complex situated at the back side of the campus, buffered by some woods. A major highway can be accessed in less than two minutes, and fast-food restaurants are also mere minutes away by car. The Vetter Middle School campus is striking, in this regard, since it provides a green oasis in the midst of a concrete jungle.

The Vetter Middle School webpage is minimalist in its design, with only ten total pages of information, and it provides few informational resources for public consumption. References to CCR are weak and include lackluster curriculum statements such as "rigor, differentiation, remediation, and acceleration are fundamentals for excellence" and "Every student can achieve the highest levels of academic excellence." (Vetter Middle School, n.d. *About Us: We Believe,* para. 1). The school claims that its curriculum is centered around Stephen Covey's seven habits of highly effective people, but this is hard to digest since this statement suggests an extremely limited educational domain with little alignment to North Carolina's mandated curriculum standards. The mission, vision, and values statements also dodge curriculum support, with only a passing reference to learning standards. The Vetter School's mission "is to support every student in becoming leaders through maximizing their academic potential and developing care and compassion for others." (Indistar, 2023, *NC Star School Board/Guest Access Vetter Middle,* para.3).

Figure 17. Vetter Middle School

Gridgeview Middle School

Gridgeview Middle School is located on the corner of a busy street which provides access to both the school and the residences which surround it. The campus has an unusually large parking lot for a middle school, and this suggests the possibility that the campus used to house a

high school. The large parking lot is useful, however, for managing the school's car line since it provides ample room for cars to form a snaking queue without blocking traffic on the busy thoroughfare. The school buildings are modern in their architectural style, with a mixture of concrete corduroy slabs and bricks. The distinguishing feature of the school is a large tower which is located along the car line and does not appear to serve any function other than aesthetics. The main campus building is a large two-story structure with connecting single-level hallways. The surrounding neighborhood is clearly affluent since several of the communities are gated, and the lots are large with uniquely designed residences.

Unlike the Vetter Middle School website, which had only ten total pages of resources and information, the Gridgeview Middle School webpage was a great resource for information about the school and its programs. There were over thirty separate pages of information about the school, which included athletics, mission and vision statements, bell schedules, and a weekly newsletter. The school's vision statement references CCR language when it states that Gridgeview provides "an environment of academic excellence where students are prepared to meet and exceed their future challenges. We recognize each student's worth and develop lifelong learners who make positive contributions to our changing society." (Gridgeview Middle School, n.d., *Our School: About Us,* para. 1). The school aligns itself even more closely with CCR expectations when it also states that it "provides an academically rigorous environment that supports the skills necessary for success in the 21st Century" (Gridgeview Middle School, n.d., *Our School: About Us,* para. 3). The "About Us" webpage also states that "Students will be prepared for Advanced Placement, International Baccalaureate, or other rigorous programs offered at the high school level" suggesting that their academic programs are pre-college-preparatory in nature. (Gridgeview Middle School, n.d., *Our School: About Us,* para. 6). The

162

school's newsletter hints at the affluence of the student body's families because they are in the midst of an annual fundraiser, and they have already raised 47% of the $45,000.00 goal (Gridgeview Middle School, n.d.). This is not unexpected, however, since the school is considered a magnet and the neighborhood student population appears to have high levels of both social and financial capital.

Figure 18. Gridgeview Middle School
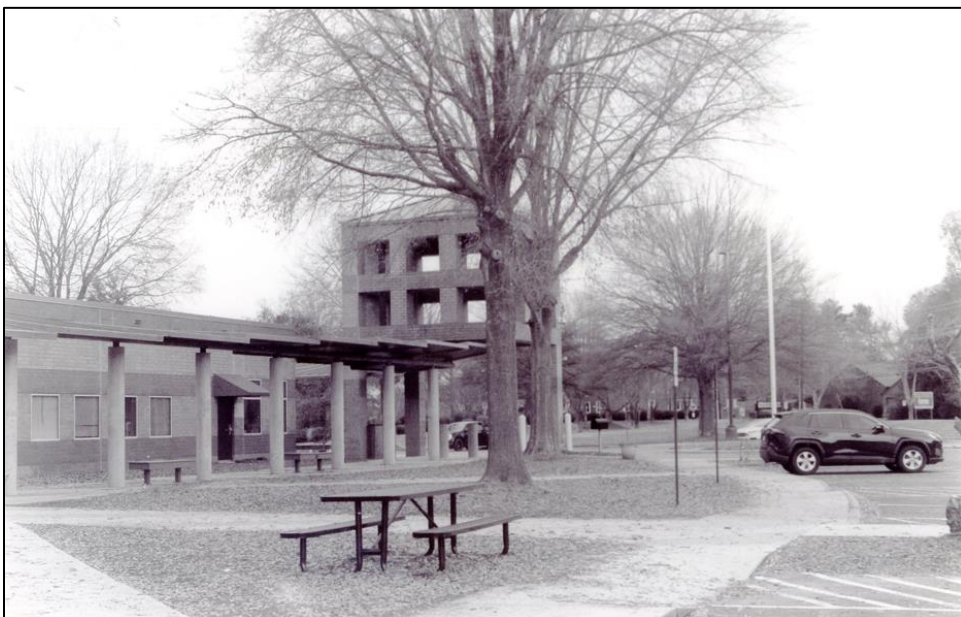
Tennetville High School

Anna described Tennetville High School as an elegant trailer park, and a visit to the campus showed why she made this statement which could be interpreted as disparaging. The school is a charter school which had to "build" its own campus with limited resources, and this meant steel frame warehouse style structures for the main buildings, supplemented by two rows of modular units for the classrooms. Unlike most school campuses, where the trailers are clustered near one of the main building access points, Tennetville's modular units are about a hundred yards away from the main campus buildings and they are arranged in neat rows with a street running down the middle. Fortunately, access to this pathway is restricted by tall traffic cones, although replacement with sturdy bollards would improve campus safety dramatically. Despite the quirky nature of the campus building spaces, the campus is clean, and the landscaping is attractive. A white rail fence lines the public access portions of the campus, providing additional control of the flow of traffic while beautifying the campus grounds. Like Vetter Middle School, the Tennetville campus is located on a country road that is just a half a mile away from businesses and commercial activity. Its location is suburban, with a rural flavor because the open fields of nearby large acreage lots border the school.

As a charter school, Tennetville High is clearly marketing itself as a college preparatory high school, with the end goal of college enrollment in mind. For this reason, their website was full of CCR references including the homepage which states that Tennetville High School "is a charter school that equips college-bound students with the right tools for academic success" (Tennetville High School, 2023). The school's vision statement reiterates this mantra while the mission statement includes the following (Tennetville High School, 2023, *About: About*):

Tennetville High School will offer a challenging character-based education. By

providing a strong curriculum and an atmosphere of high expectations, students can

master basic skills and realize full academic potential in preparation for higher education

and life-long learning. (para. 1)

This statement closely aligns itself with CCR expectations but the "About Us" page goes even

further by stating the career element succinctly in its message to future students; "Whether

students choose a 4-year college, the military or a technical school, they will be well prepared."

(Tennetville High School, 2023, *About: About: Future Students,* para. 1). This singular

statement is one of the most closely aligned CCR statements seen in school advertising literature,

and it is particularly unique because it placed the military before technical school. This should

not be surprising, however, since one of the elements of the NCLB legislation was that schools

would provide the military with access to their students for the purpose of recruiting. It is

possible that this relationship is well established at Tennetville, and the charter school gains

additional resources as a consequence.

The "Guidance" tab provided numerous examples of college preparatory activities and

the school calendar showed college visits by a number of universities which were holding

information sessions for the seniors at Tennetville. The guidance department promises to

"facilitate the academic progress, the personal and social development, and the college/career

decision making processes for all high school students" (Tennetville High School, 2023,

Academics: Guidance: Guidance Department, para. 1). The guidance tab also provides multiple

links to military careers information, including the Armed Services Vocational Aptitude Battery

(ASVAB) Career Exploration Program and veteran and military education information. In

addition to the numerous college resources available on this webpage, there is also a "College

Acceptances" tab that is used to recognize and highlight the colleges that Tennetville students have been accepted into. This long brag list of college programs, that students had gained admittance to was impressive, but notably missing were schools like Duke and the Ivy League campuses. This suggests that while the school has impressive placements, its profile is not fully aligned with the top tier universities in the country. The service academies are prominently featured on this page as well as several of the military colleges like the Citadel. What was most impressive about this list, in terms of CCR, was that it also included community colleges and other technical and career programs including ITT Technical Institute of Charlotte, and the CPCC-Baking and Pastry Arts School. Tennetville clearly celebrates both college and career pathways, and this is unusual since both are given equal footing on the brag sheet.

Figure 19. Tennetville High School

Beth's Secondary Schools

Beth's middle school and high school are located next to each other on the same side of a street which is located on the outskirts of a medium-sized city in North Carolina. The campuses of Aurora Middle School and Western High School adjoin each other and the rest of the street is comprised of modest brick homes with large well-kept lawns. Both Aurora Middle and Western High School have district magnet programs that draw students from outside the zone, and the buildings of both campuses are well kept despite their age. Large oak trees dominate the neighborhood where the schools are situated, and major highways are accessible within a five-minute driving distance.

Aurora Middle School

The Aurora Middle School campus has the appearance of a high school because of the design of square latticed window frames against brick. The appearance invokes scenes from the technology buildings constructed on college campuses during the 1960s, when this style of

architecture was popular. Large oak trees adorn the campus which is attractive and welcoming.

While the buildings might be dated due to their age, they are well maintained and aesthetically

pleasing. The classroom buildings are two stories tall, and this building height is consistent

across the campus. The campus is accessible from a two-lane street that bisects the

neighborhood with sidewalks on both sides, to provide safe pedestrian access to the school.

While the street is quiet when school is not in session, it is obvious that traffic snarls when the

school is dismissing. The traffic challenges are partially alleviated, however, because the

Western High School arrival and dismissal times are set an hour later every day. While this

offset schedule is beneficial for traffic, parents who have students at both school campuses likely

deal with over two hours of total drop-off and pickup time each day.

The school website proudly highlights the school's status as a district Science and

Technology Magnet School, but is disappointing because most of the information that the school

provides is generic district documentation. The accessible student handbook dates back to the

2019-2020 school year, and is district applicable, instead of Aurora Middle School specific.

There are no vision or values statements, and it is obvious that the district is structured from the

top down without much local autonomy. The mission statement is located at the bottom of every

school webpage, and it states that the school's mission (Aurora Middle School, 2022):

> is to promote academic achievement in a caring environment consistent with the middle
>
> school philosophy by encouraging responsible decision-making, cultural understanding,
>
> and respect for self and others while exposing students and teachers to cutting edge
>
> technology in an inquiry based science curriculum. (para. 5)

This mission statement almost completely dodges CCR curriculum entirely, but the school

partially redeems this oversight by referencing college preparation on the "About Us" page as

168

follows; **"**Students will benefit from the integration of science, technology and mathematics throughout the curriculum with a primary focus on literacy, college and career preparation." (Aurora Middle School, 2022, *About Us,* para. 1). This language is further supported by the following statement about the CTE program, for eighth graders, which asserts that "Students will move toward college and career readiness by engaging in the relentless pursuit of excellence." (Aurora Middle School, 2023, *About Us,* para. 2). These were the only CCR references available, since most of the information provided on the school's website was generic and applied to all middle schools throughout the district.

Figure 20. Aurora Middle School

Western High School

Western High School is located to the north of Aurora Middle School and while its architectural style is similar, the brick construction is comprised of yellow brick instead of red. The campus is deceptively large since only a few buildings are clearly visible from the street, with most of the structures hidden from view. Like the Aurora Middle campus, the building designs are dated, but the Western High School buildings appear to have been built about a decade later with an architectural style that was prevalent in the 1970s. One of the unique features of the campus is the depth, which provides a natural security buffer from public access from the street, due to natural and designed screening. Large oak trees adorn the campus along with other varieties of trees and landscaping shrubs. Bike racks are prominently arranged near the front face of the campus, suggesting the likelihood that many students ride to school from the surrounding neighborhoods.

170

Like Aurora Middle School, Western High School is a district magnet school, but it is different because it "offers students several opportunities for success, including a traditional high school experience and two schools-within-a-school" (Western High School, 2022, *About Us,* para. 2). The mission and vision statements are bland, and do not reference CCR explicitly, but there are several tabs accessible from the homepage which align themselves fully with college and career readiness. These tabs include the Career and Technical Education pages which are accessed from the Departments tab, as well as the College Advisor and Career Development tabs which provide ample CCR information (Western High School, 2022, *Departments & Student Services*). While these web pages contain over ten CCR references that are explicit, they are almost all generic district linked pages which lack authenticity, as a result. Western High School clearly provides college and career resources, but their curriculum offerings seem diluted because of the reliance on generic webpages which are used by several of the district's schools.

Figure 21. Western High School
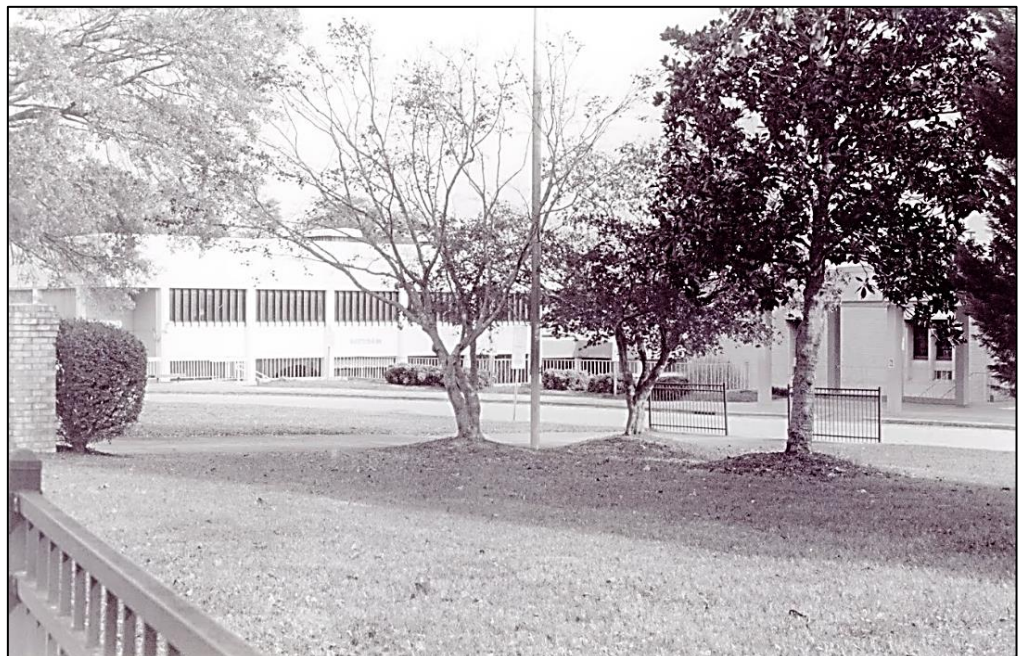
Heather's Secondary Schools

Heather attended two schools during grades six through eight and she also took a few college courses at the district's career center during her senior year. What is especially interesting about her experience is that she started at Benetteville Charter School in kindergarten and continued attending classes on the same campus through eighth grade. Heather noted that the dynamics of the middle school program were different than the lower grades, and this was when she first noticed the "policing" of students of color at the school. Heather then moved to Lincoln High School, which was previously discussed in detail, where she completed her high school requirements in preparation for matriculating at a four-year college.

Benetteville Charter School

This school is located on a country road on the outskirts of one of North Carolina's larger cities, and while it is a traditional brick and mortar style building, the campus has a similar appearance to Tennetville High School in its layout and general parking scheme. The campus is

172

nestled behind a row of large acreage residential homes, and is difficult to see from the main road which provides access to the parking lots and school building. The campus is composed of a singular building which is only one-story high, and shaped like a capital "F." This arrangement suggests that the middle school program is separated from the elementary school by the middle crossbar of the "F," while the lower trunk is probably serving the lower grades. The main entrance to the building is located at the middle crossbar and this is probably where the cafeteria and administrative offices are located. A large, covered walkway runs parallel to the trunk, and the middle crossbar, providing ample car line space for loading and unloading students in inclement weather. This large car line is necessary because the district does not provide bus service to its charter schools, and this means that all students are car riders. The campus is tidy and clean, and the exterior of the building is well maintained.

Due to the broad range of grades that Benetteville Charter serves, the school's messaging was not likely to focus on CCR since this curriculum is usually found in the secondary school domain. The school's website has a "What We Teach" tab which has separate webpages for four distinct academic programs which are labeled "Kindergarten-2nd, 3rd-5th, 6th-8th, and Excel-erate" (Benetteville Charter School, n.d., *What We Teach*). The 6th-8th page provides explicit CCR references in several places, including the Parent/Student handbook which has a college readiness section which states, "The school's focus on a liberal arts education provides the academic foundation necessary to succeed in an increasingly global and competitive society." (Benetteville Charter School, n.d., *What We Teach: 6th – 8th: Parent/Student Handbook*). The school is also affiliated with a national charter/academy which has a purpose statement in the school's handbook which reads, "Our early childhood, elementary, middle school, and high school programs are designed to put children on a solid path to success in high school, college,

and beyond." (Benetteville Charter School, n.d., *What We Teach: 6th – 8th: Parent/Student Handbook: National Heritage Academies*). Finally, the 6th-8th page has a description of the middle school program which states that Bennetville's middle school students "analyze and question the world around them, as they prepare for high-school, college and careers. Equipped with a solid moral and academic foundation, students are ready to succeed." (Benetteville Charter School, n.d., *What We Teach: 6th – 8t,* para. 1). This final statement is fully aligned with CCR curriculum objectives, and this should not be surprising since the school presents itself as an alternative to traditional public schools, and must market itself accordingly.

Figure 22. Benetteville Charter School

David's Secondary Schools

David's secondary schooling was characterized by several in-district school transfers, as well as a move to a neighboring school district, which would lead him to residency in five different schools in the span of six years. Both school districts were in large cities, and David was able to make the adjustments without much difficulty, likely due to similarities between the schools in either of the school systems. He studied at Wright Hills and Bentrock Middle School during grades six through eight, and then continued in ninth grade at Reedbush High School which was in the same district. His father then moved with him to the adjacent county, and he found himself in a magnet program at Sandhills High School, where he continued to nurture his interest in the medical field. David would make his final transfer, after his sophomore year, when he would enroll at Plover High School and meet several of the teachers who would provide the guidance necessary to help him with his journey to college. Plover High School's HOSA program was especially pivotal, since he was not only able to receive CNA certification, but also compete nationally due to his skills competency.

175

Wright Hills Middle School

Wright Hills Middle School sits on a large hill nestled in a quiet neighborhood on the

outskirts of a large city in North Carolina. The campus is not readily accessible to the public

since it has locked gates which restrict access from the main street. The school appears to have

been designed with student safety in mind because its brick walls have an unusually small

number of windows, which are placed above head height, to provide natural light for the

classrooms. Many of the brick walls, which line the exterior surfaces, have no windows at all.

This façade gives the campus an institutional appearance which appears to be a mix between a

jail building and a college classroom building designed in the 1970s or 1980s. There are

numerous covered walkways to protects students from inclement weather when walking between

building or accessing the bus or car lines. The campus is attractive, but does not appear to have

been designed for educating young adolescent students.

The school's homepage provides a panorama of school pictures, and scenes of happy

students being engaged, along with the mission statement which explicitly promotes CCR

curriculum. The mission of Wright Hills Middle School "is to prepare students for high school

and beyond by creating a community of learners working together in a safe environment that

encourages academic, social and personal growth." (Wright Hills Middle School, 2022, *About

Us,* para. 3). The vision statement alludes to CCR curriculum with a statement about high

expectations and successful learning, but the connection is vague at best. The Wright Hills

Middle School Student and Family Handbook provides an incredibly detailed explanation of

school rules, policies, and protocols, but it does not provide CCR references for stakeholders

(Wright Hills Middle School, 2022, *Parents: WHMS Student & Family Handbook*). Oddly, the

handbook does not provide the school's mission and vision statements which are typical front-

page information in school handbooks. The school's Counseling Department tab provides an

extremely well-designed mission/purpose statement which is one of the most comprehensive

CCR references seen in this study (Wright Hills Middle School, 2022, *Counseling Department*):

> WHMS' School Counseling Department empowers all students to reach their maximum
>
> potential by using a comprehensive program that addresses academic, personal/social,
>
> and career goals. We promote an environment to encourage personal inquiry and growth,
>
> social responsibility, and academic excellence. WHMS' School counselors believe that
>
> every student can succeed through the collaborative efforts of school, home, and
>
> community leading to responsible and productive citizenship in the 21st century. (para. 2)

This comprehensive CCR aligned language addresses all aspects of CCR, including academics

and career success as well as 21st century expectations. The Counseling Department page also

includes pictures of each of the three counselors assigned to each grade level, and in a stark

departure from the norm, all of the counselors are women of color.

Figure 23. Wright Hills Middle School
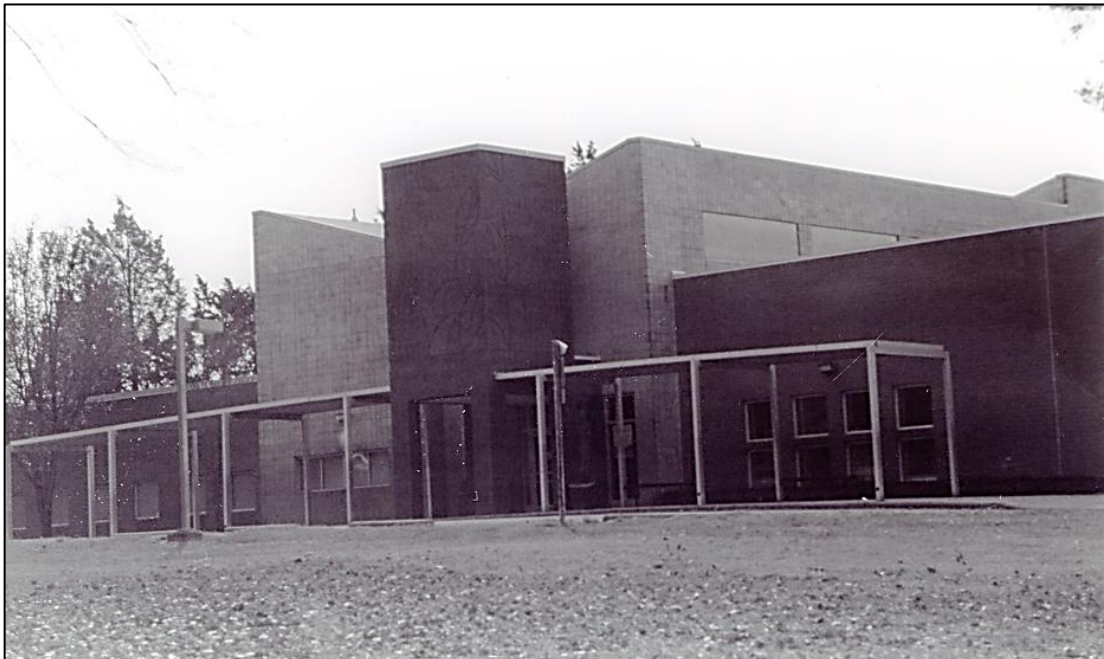
Bentrock Middle School

The Bentrock Middle School campus sits in the middle of a quiet and affluent neighborhood, far from the bustle of the city center. The surrounding lots are all residential, with larger acreage, and this provides a sense of quiet despite the busy commercial areas that surround the school at a perimeter of about a half mile. The school buildings are constructed from red bricks and the two-story structure is simple and elegant because of the contrast with the white trim of the windows. While the school's location within the neighborhood should promote students walking and riding their bikes to school, this is unsafe because there are no sidewalks on the street which provides access to the campus, and the shoulder of the two-lane road is too narrow to accommodate either pedestrians or cyclists. The large number of buses in the bus lot suggests that most of the students use district transportation to get to school, even if they live nearby. This is not unusual in North Carolina schools since many students ride the bus to school for safety reasons, despite living only blocks away from their campus.

The school's website provided only casual CCR references, which were found in the vision and mission statements at the footer of each webpage, and in the School Improvement Plan (SIP) which was accessible from the homepage (Bentrock Middle School, 2022, *About Us: School Improvement Plan*). There was a disconnect between the mission and vision statements in these two locations, however, since the language appears to have been modified in the SIP which was dated October 22, 2023. This version of the mission statement says that Bentrock Middle School, (Bentrock Middle School, 2022, *About Us: School Improvement Plan*):

> seeks to create opportunities for all stakeholders to work collaboratively. Staff, parents, and community members will seek to model the characteristics that students need to develop strong leadership skills. Our school promotes rigorous goal setting to support

178

students in reaching their full academic, personal, social and cultural potential in a global

society. (para. 1)

The mission statement on all the school's webpage footers is less expansive, and simply states

that "BMS equips students with the confidence, vision, skills and knowledge to both see and

actively reach for a better tomorrow for themselves, our community, and our nation." (Bentrock

Middle School, 2022). The vision statements also differ from each other, and only cite CCR

language implicitly. No other CCR references could be found on any of the school's webpages,

including the AG Newsletter and AG Parent Information site.

Figure 24. Bentrock Middle School

Reedbush High School

Reedbush High School is located a short distance of only 1.4 miles, by car (or half a mile geographically), from Bentrock Middle, and its campus is accessible from a small road which provides the school with a buffer from the nearby city and busy thoroughfares. The campus is hidden in an academic enclave which provides privacy and space for the students at two campuses (not including Bentrock) which are surrounded by the neighboring residences. The school's buildings are modern and constructed from a mixture of red bricks and concrete blocks which are accented with large glass panes to provide abundant natural light. The main buildings are two stories tall and connected by interior hallways. The exterior of the building has covered walkways strategically placed to accommodate inclement weather, when loading or unloading at the car lines and bus lot. The trees which dot the campus are immature suggesting that the school was built within the past twenty years. Most of the open space on the public access side of the campus is dominated by asphalt parking spots, although the rear of the school is green due

180

to the grass of the athletic fields. Despite its buffered location, the school presents an urban face to the local community, and this might be partly driven by the need for parking spaces for those students who have the resources to drive themselves to school.

According to the Reedbush High School website, the school is a district magnet specializing in Transportation, Distribution, and Logistics (Reedbush High School, 2022, *Academy: TDL Academy*). This program is likely being offered by the district because of the explosion of distribution centers along the I-85 and I-40 corridors in North Carolina, and the consequent need for workers trained in these fields. The school also has an AP Capstone Diploma Program which provides College Board recognition to students who receive passing scores on at least six AP exams, including AP Seminar and AP Research, while in high school (Reedbush High School, 2022, *Academy: AP Capstone*). An analysis of the school's website provides numerous CCR resources including the Mission and What We Do statements which serve as a footer for each webpage. The Career and Technology Education tab, which is found under the Student Services tab on the homepage, provides a list of additional webpages and resources that are closely aligned with CCR curriculum expectations. (Reedbush High School, 2022, *Student Services: Career and Technology Education*). These include Career and Technical Service Organizations, Career Readiness, College Readiness, Career Development, and contact information for the school's Career and College Manager who assists students with their CCR planning (Reedbush High School, 2022, *Student Services: Career and Technology Education*). Her webpage says that she is the students' "career facilitating agent, who works to ensure that students are guided into a talent pipeline for in-demand, high-skilled and/or high-wage occupations that aligns with a student's passions, knowledge, skills and interests." (Reedbush High School, 2022, *Student Services: Career and Technology Education,* para.1).

Figure 25. Reedbush High School

Sandhills High School

Sandhills High School has a large campus which is located on the periphery of a large

city in a quasi-rural neighborhood made up of modest brick and siding homes which are dwarfed

by their large acreage lots. The outside of the brick building is festive, and the covered

walkways used for accessing the car line and bus lots are uniquely designed colonnades which provide a flair against the backdrop of the looming red walls. The school's academic program uses an Academic and Technology Magnet designation to attract students from outside the immediate neighborhood, and this means enrollment is not limited to the regional zone.

The school's mission, which was found in the student handbook, states that Sandhills High School "will engage our students in relevant and rigorous STEM experiences in academics, athletics, and the arts in order for them to thrive in our world!" (Sandhills High School, 2022, *Student Handbook,* p. 2). This is not a strong CCR statement, but the focus on STEM and academics does appear to pay homage to college and career readiness. The "Why Choose Sandhills" tab, which is prominently displayed on the homepage, says that the school has "been designated by the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction as an "NC STEM Model School"" which has "electives like no other school in the district and like few schools in North Carolina." (Sandhills High School, 2022, *About Us: Why Choose Sandhills?* para. 4). Sandhills High School also offers "majors" which "students may take to specifically give them first-hand experiences with a number of STEM college fields of study." (Sandhills High School, 2022, *About Us: Why Choose Sandhills?* para. 4). Numerous CCR references can be found on the Career and Technical Education page that can be accessed from the Departments tab which is located on the school's homepage. The school also has a Career Development Coordinator who is responsible for assisting students with "planning and preparing for: 2 or 4 year college careers, Military Service, Post High School Job/Career services" and "Personal and Professional career skills." (Sandhills High School, 2022, *Departments: Career and Technical Education: Career Development Coordinator,* para. 4). Military service was listed prominently,

183

but like Burris High School, Sandhills also has a JROTC program, and this means an enhanced

relationship with the military.

Figure 26. Sandhills High School

Plover High School

The Plover High School campus lies in a slight depression at the bottom of a hill on the periphery of a large city. The school setting has a rural character because the campus is surrounded by woods on all sides and cannot be seen from any of the major roads which provide indirect access to the school buildings and athletic fields. One of the unique features of the campus is a student parking lot which is perched above the school on a hill, and provides a unique vantage point looking down upon the buildings. The school appears to have had major building additions constructed, because most of the campus has one-story brick buildings which appear to be older and stand in the background of the large multi-story buildings which sport a much more modern architectural style. The newer buildings are constructed of red bricks with contrasting gray concrete slabs while the older buildings are classic red brick. The campus also has several pods of modular classrooms which are used to provide additional classroom space for students. The campus landscaping is mature as evidenced by large trees which grace the campus grounds.

A topical analysis of the Plover High School website suggests the school is weakly aligned with CCR curriculum despite several internal programs which are career preparatory. The school has a HOSA chapter which provides high school students with exposure to healthcare fields as well as a large JROTC program with an impressive website presence. It should be noted that the JROTC program specifically states that "JROTC is NOT a recruitment program" while also stating that it "does show cadets future career opportunities in the military" (Plover High School, 2022, *Activities: JROTC: Who We Are: What is JROTC?* para. 2). This appears to be a form of double-speak because the Career Technical Education page has a Military Information tab which provides information about joining the armed services (Plover High

185

School, 2022, *Departments: Career Technical Education: Military Information*). While the question of recruitment would require interviews with students in the JROTC program, the military clearly has a large presence at the school.

While the mission and vision statements only provided lukewarm support for CCR, there was ample evidence of the curriculum and practices found on the Career Technical Education webpage, which was full of resources centered around college and career readiness. In fact, this singular webpage was one of the most exemplary resources for college and career planning information studied during this research project. The Career Development Coordinator's webpage used the same language as the coordinator at Sandhills High School, and this direct alignment makes it obvious that this information is provided by a district template since both high schools are in the same Local Education Agency. A final source for CCR alignment at Plover High School was found on the National Academy of Finance (NAF) page which succinctly states, "NAF is a national network of educational, business and community leaders who work together to ensure high school students are college, career and future ready." (Plover High School, 2022, *Departments: NAF Academy of Finance,* para. 1). The NAF provides additional clarification by stating that the three-year school-within-a-school program "allows students to learn universal business skills and knowledge with a focus on the financial industry" and provides them with the "opportunity to gain work-based learning experiences to learn 21st century skills and become college and career ready." (Plover High School, 2022, *Departments: NAF Academy of Finance,* para. 2). Clearly, the NAF has studied CCR curriculum and nomenclature and has gone to great lengths to promote these ideals as a marketing strategy to attract students.

Figure 27. Plover High School

Ben's Secondary Schools

Ben attended two schools to complete his secondary education and they were largely

predetermined because of his participation in the Spanish Immersion program in his county. He

attended Jackson Middle School for grades six through eight and then attended Chamberlain

High School for grades nine through twelve. While his elementary and middle school were largely minority schools, with the Spanish Immersion program operating on the campus, Chamberlain was only 50% minority according to his estimate. Ben argues that his experience at his high school was beneficial because the complex demographics of this campus better prepared him for college by improving his "interpersonal connection skills" and "being socialized and being able to communicate" with his peers.

Jackson Middle School

The Jackson Middle school campus speaks to history, because of its location in an old neighborhood in a busy commercial sector of a large city. The main building is a classic style red brick, two-story building which is typical of schools built in the early 20th century. Additional buildings were later erected on the campus, in a similar brick stye, and they are connected to the main building by covered walkways which blend into the mature landscaping of the campus. Despite its urban location, the campus is large and has ample space for its numerous athletic fields which occupy roughly half of the total acreage which is bordered by busy streets on two of its three sides.

An exhaustive search through the Jackson Middle School website was disappointing because there was almost no language that was aligned in any fashion with CCR curriculum. What was perhaps even more disappointing, was that there were no tangible references to the future in any of the school's documents, with the exception of the STEM Magnet statement which was a direct citation from the district's STEM program documentation (Jackson Middle School, 2022, *About Us: Middle Magnet School: STEM Program).* The school website was disappointing for a host of reasons including a dearth of useful information for stakeholders, a failure to establish a clear mission and vision, and a plethora of outdated informational

documents which reference staff members who are no longer working at the school. Some of the

documents on the school's website are dated as far back as the 2018/2019 school year suggesting

that nobody at the school has been performing webpage housekeeping for almost five years. One

possible explanation for this lapse, is that the principal was recently appointed to the school and

the school is in the process of returning to normalcy after a possible leadership vacuum which

impacted its operations.

Figure 28. Jackson Middle School
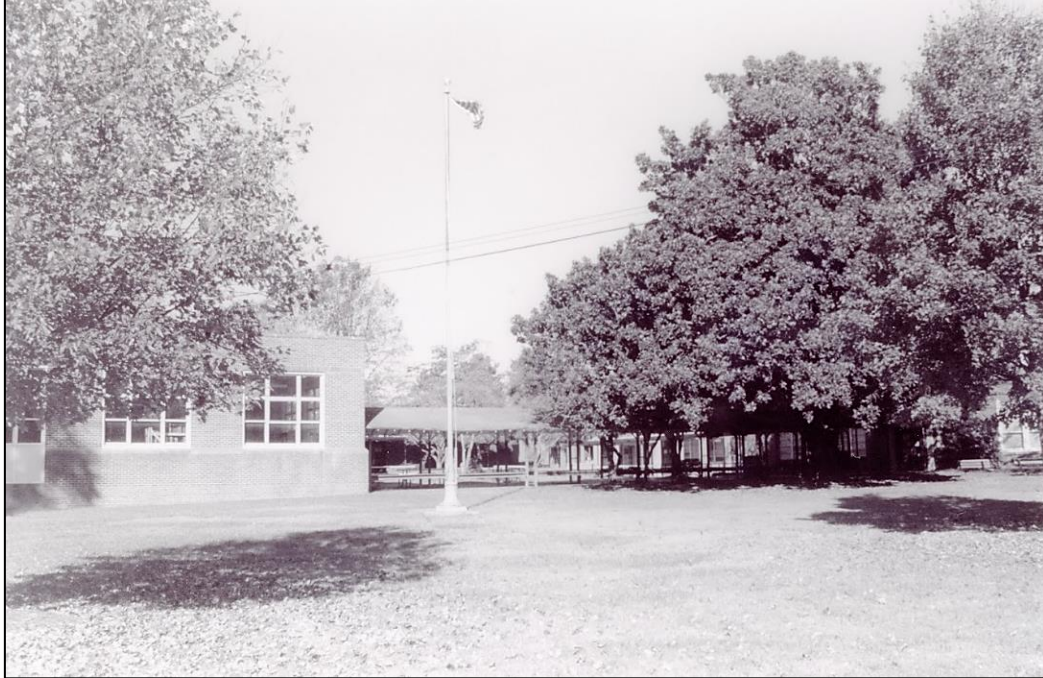
Chamberlain High School

The Chamberlain High School campus is sprawling and located a short distance from the center of the large city that it serves. The campus is surrounded by a greenway and open spaces on two of its three sides, while it fronts a well-established neighborhood on the last boundary. The school's main campus buildings are large and imposing and were built on a hill which overlooks the residential neighborhood to its east. Brick and stucco colonnades provide covered walkways between the numerous campus structures, and additional covered paths are used to access the bus lot in inclement weather. The campus is effectively screened from the adjacent neighborhood by mature trees which provide privacy and complement the early 20th century architecture of the campus. Sidewalks surround the campus, and the greenway connects the school to additional residential areas to the south and west, providing access for pedestrians and cyclists alike.

At a first glance, the Chamberlain High School website does not appear to provide much in terms of CCR references, but this is largely because of its cluttered arrangement. The homepage has roughly 35 tabs which access additional information, and consequently the mission and vision statements are not readily apparent. These statements can be found under the school improvement plan, which is nested three levels beneath the homepage. The mission statement explicitly supports CCR curriculum as it states (Chamberlain High School, 2022, *About Us: School Leadership Information, School Improvement Plan 2022-2023*):

> Chamberlain High School's mission is for teachers, administrators, support staff and parents to work together in developing each student's potential so that every child will be prepared to enter an institution of higher learning or the workforce and to become a productive member of the global community as well as a lifelong learner. (para. 3)

While this mission statement is a bit unwieldy, it fully captures the essence of CCR principles, which are further supported on the pages that are linked to both the CTE and AP/IB Programs tabs (Chamberlain High School, 2022). There are fourteen resource tabs on the CTE page, and the AP/IB tabs stress the value of rigorous coursework for earning college credit in high school, while becoming better prepared to be successful in undergraduate studies (Chamberlain High School, 2022, *CTE, AP/IB*). The CTE page, along with its wealth of resources, provides a high level of CCR support due to its focus on post-secondary education and job and career placement. The "Why CTE?" tab promotes the CTE program by emphasizing that it (Chamberlain High School, 2022, *CTE, Why CTE?*):

> prepares all students for high skill, high wage or in-demand careers. The experience begins with career inspiration in Pre-K, awareness in elementary school, exploration in middle school, and preparation in high school. CTE equips students for post-secondary

education and immediate employment opportunities to successfully compete worldwide.

(para. 1)

This expansive vision of CTE, coupled with the school's college preparatory curriculum programs, provides students with a CCR experience which builds upon exposure which was potentially implemented starting in their first year in public education. Naturally, this statement is optimistic, because Chamberlain High School cannot fully control the curriculum that students are taught during their elementary and middle school education. The school website also features a JROTC link on its homepage, but this link misdirects followers to a commercial website for Shutterfly (Chamberlain High School, 2022, *JROTC*). Chamberlain High School JROTC information can be found on Instagram and Facebook, despite the corrupted link on the school's primary webpage.

Figure 29. Chamberlain High School

Schools and CCR Curriculum Delivery

While the participants in the study were homogeneous regarding their successful

matriculation at the same university, their backgrounds were diverse and the secondary schools

that they attended were spread across the state in a diffuse fashion. In addition, the individual

characteristics of their schools were markedly different, and this was often influenced by the

community where the schools were situated. The characteristics of the 28 unique schools,

researched in the study, are summarized in Table 3, with a focus on the traits which were either

part of the conversations during the interviews, or of interest to the research project.

Architectural styles were determined by contacting an architect who specializes in classical

architecture, and is also well versed in nineteenth and twentieth century construction (A.

Preudhomme, personal communication, September 12, 2023).

Table 3. Secondary Schools Attended by Study Participants

School Name	Grades	Setting	NC Region	Architectural Style	CCR Alignment
Arbor Village High	9-12	S	Piedmont	Post Modern	H
Aurora Middle	6-8	U	Piedmont	Mid Century Modern	M
Benetteville Charter School	K-8	S	Piedmont	Traditionally Inspired	H
Bentrock Middle	6-8	U	Piedmont	Classically Inspired	L
Buffington High	9-12	U	Mountains	Classical	L
Burris High	9-12	R	Coastal Plains	Mid Century Modern	L
Chamberlain High	9-12	U	Piedmont	Gothic Revival	H
City Heights High	9-12	U	Piedmont	Mid Century Modern	M
Gridgeview Middle	6-8	U	Piedmont	Mid Century Modern	M
Jackson Middle	6-8	U	Piedmont	Colonial	L
Jamison Arts School	6-12	U	Piedmont	Mid Century Modern	H
Jefferson Early College	9-12	U	Piedmont	Colonial	H
Lesterview Middle	6-8	U	Coastal Plains	Mid Century Modern	L
Lincoln High	9-12	U	Piedmont	Classical	H
Lowell Middle	6-8	U	Mountains	Classically Inspired	L
Maverick Middle	6-8	U	Piedmont	Mid Century Modern	H
Plains Middle	6-12	R	Piedmont	Mid Century Modern	L
Plover High	9-12	S	Piedmont	Mid Century Modern	H
Reedbush High	9-12	U	Piedmont	Mid Century Modern	H
Sandhills High	9-12	S	Piedmont	Mid Century Modern	M
Tennetville High	9-12	S	Piedmont	Traditionally Inspired	H
Terraville Middle	6-8	U	Piedmont	Mid Century Modern	H
Vetter Middle	6-8	U	Piedmont	Mid Century Modern	L
Washington High	9-12	U	Coastal Plains	Mid Century Modern	L
Western High	9-12	U	Piedmont	Mid Century Modern	M
Weston Elementary	Pk-8	R	Coastal Plains	Post Modern	H
Woodburn Arts School	6-12	U	Piedmont	Colonial	M
Wright Hills Middle	6-8	S	Piedmont	Mid Century Modern	L

***Codes: Setting=Rural (R), Suburban (S), and Urban (U)
CCR Alignment = Low (L), Minimal (M), and High (H)

Three classifications were used for describing the geographic settings where the schools were located, and these were rural (R), suburban (S), and urban (U). Most of the schools were geographically situated in urban environments, while six were located in the suburbs, and only three were classified as rural and this was generally because they served agricultural communities. Three codes were also used to describe the level of CCR commitment or alignment as discerned from the school's public facing documentation. A school whose

194

documents had almost no references to CCR was classified as "Low" for alignment whereas a school that appeared to heavily promote CCR curriculum would receive an "H" for a "High" level of alignment. Schools which alluded to CCR curriculum, but were not explicitly supported by the language in their documentation, were classified with an "M" for "Minimal" CCR alignment.

The architectural styles of the schools were defined by the observations of a practicing classical architect who viewed the photographs and classified them based upon the buildings that they could see well enough to examine. It should be noted that many school campuses are comprised of a mixture of buildings, which were constructed during different time periods, so the architectural style might not be uniform across the school's grounds. The physical attributes of a school can provide hints about the school's role in the community since the wide variety of school campuses provided some insights not only about the schools themselves, but also the communities they served and the goals and priorities which they held dear. In this regard, there appeared to be a pattern of schools which were clearly representative of community pride, and the architectural grandeur of these schools suggested the possibility that they represent "district flagships" which are used by their communities as marketing tools to promote their towns, cities, and counties (Farrell, 2013).

Flagship status does not always signal academic excellence since many district flagships maintain their role because of a history of investment, location in a prominent city in the district, or because of local tradition. In many districts there is a convergence where the flagships are also the academic focal points for the LEA, but this is an ideal rather than a standard practice, because of the competing interests which intersect to confer this lofty status on a school. This is especially true in Alamance County since the newly built Southeast Alamance High School has

taken the designation of district flagship from Walter Williams High School because of a massive realignment of resources away from the city of Burlington towards a more rural portion of the county. Walter Williams held the title of district flagship for many decades after it had already gone into an academic decline, and a recognition that this title has been usurped is evident from numerous current references to the school as "one of the flagship schools of the Alamance-Burlington School System" (Walter M. Williams High School, 2023). Flagship schools are particularly relevant to this research project because they are often recognizable from their images, and many of the participants in this study attended flagships which suggests an intersectionality between access to CCR resources and successful college matriculation.

School Design and College and Career Preparedness

One of the questions that this study hoped to resolve was the issue of how school design potentially impacts the delivery of a CCR curriculum, and promotes effective learning practices in general. Stated differently, the question at hand is whether schools are being designed with curriculum intentionality, or they are built with other goals being prioritized, and teachers and administrators then find a way to work with the physical plant that is available. During the second-round interviews, when photographs of the schools were shown to the study participants, they were asked about their schools' curriculum functionality to see what their perceptions were regarding school design and how it may have impacted or influenced their college and career readiness.

The single largest influence that secondary school campus designs had on college and career readiness was acclimation to college campuses where classrooms were spread across multiple buildings and students had to navigate long walks between their courses. This was especially true on some of the larger school campuses like Burris, Lincoln, Vetter, Washington,

and Woodburn which promoted responsibility and independence due to the separation between buildings and academic programs. According to Heather, Lincoln High School:

> prepared me better for how college campuses were, because of course we had our classes in different buildings and sometimes you would have class on the third floor, like I did, and then had to rush all the way to the other side of the campus to go to another class.

Heather also felt that the separate wings which housed departments like math and history also created a collegial experience which was useful for college preparation. Lisa also attended Lincoln High and she said that during the orientation that she attended with her family, the students were told that the design of the campus provided "almost a college campus feel" which was supported by her father who said "man, I feel like I am back at A & T." Lisa specifically cited the separate arts building, auditorium, and "the gym way across the street" as features which helped her prepare her for the physical layout of a college campus. Shelby was impressed that high school students at Burris High School were "allowed to walk like outside for a lot of the classes" and this was especially true for the technology courses, because these buildings were separated from the main campus by a considerable distance providing the students with increased freedom. According to Shelby, this was in stark contrast to her middle school experience at Weston Elementary, where all of the transitions between classrooms occurred within the same building. Sarah remembers her middle school being extremely crowded and for this reason she felt that Washington High School "was better in design for readiness than my middle school because I kind of felt that the middle school was fine, like for regular things, but not when it came to extracurriculars." The improvement in elective classes, and the variety of extracurricular activities, was often viewed favorably because most of the high school campuses had more space for enrichment courses.

197

Both Jenna and Anna cited their middle school campuses, for being supportive of their college and career readiness, for similar reasons that their peers spoke favorably about their high schools. This was probably because they both attended grades 6-12 arts schools which had additional resources on the campus because they were also catering to a high school curriculum. Jamison Arts School, which Anna attended, was characterized by:

> a lot of buildings…in the back and you have the gymnasium, and you had some of
> the like theater stuff as well. And it also had like a dance studio. So, it was smaller
> concentrations of whatever people's focus was in different regions of the building.

Anna captured the availability of an expanded elective curriculum at Jamison Arts School succinctly because she articulated the fact that the school had spaces for a wide range of academic concentrations, which was something found on a college campus. While Jenna was extremely critical of the City Heights Early College for its lack of space, and dissimilarity with a real college experience, she complimented Woodburn Arts School because it "had a lot of places to go and explore" and the auditorium was "a pinnacle of that school because we had majors…[which] would have performances" for the school in that space. Jenna also said that she was not only able to use the auditorium for dance, orchestra, chorus, and art class, but she also met different teachers in this space, and this expanded her educational viewpoint dramatically.

Both Jenna and Anna expressed disappointment with their high schools since they did not feel as though the campus designs were favorable for college preparedness. Jenna was genuinely disappointed, when she first arrived at City Heights Early College, because she thought the large modern building where the school's campus was located was fully accessible to the City Heights students. When she found out that her program had only four classrooms in the building during her first year she was frustrated, but it was much the same the following year when she "only got

198

to see one new room…because we had gotten another teacher and they let us have another room, but we were in the same lab." Jenna says that students at City Heights Early College were excited on the rare occasions when they had field trips, because these were "probably the only times we ever really got off campus" and otherwise they were "confined to four different rooms," on the same floor in the building that she initially admired. Jenna also noted that the building which was next to the building in which their campus was located, was a dorm building, and for this reason the school staff was especially vigilant about making sure that the Early College students did not have any contact with either the building or the college-age residents.

Anna was critical of Tennetville High School, the charter school that she attended for grades 9-12, since the school's campus was composed of a main building for administration, a gymnasium building, and two rows of modular classrooms which she described as "mainly a trailer park." She conceded that the campus "was not as nice as it looks currently" because when she attended there were no trees or landscaping and there was not "much beautification going on." Interestingly, her criticisms regarding college preparation at Tennetville started with the campus buildings but quickly moved to a criticism of the teaching staff whom she felt were not fully qualified and "one in particular, my science teacher, he did not do his job at all. All we did was like watch movies and never turn in work." She says that she recently learned that for "charter schools, you do not need to have a background in education. You could just work" and she finds this both surprising and disappointing.

Heather was disappointed that her middle school experience was on a campus that was shared with an elementary school, and only separated by the fact that it was located in one of three separate hallways. The first hallway contained the kindergarten and first grade students, the second housed second grade through fifth grade, and the final hallway, which was located

next to the administrative offices, served grades six through eight. This arrangement was convenient for Benetteville Charter school, but did not provide an experience that would help students as they continued in their studies, because the benchmarks (first grade hall to higher elementary and later fifth grade to middle school hall) were purely superficial. She was excited to attend Lincoln High School where there were clear boundaries established to separate a nearby middle school, and its students, from their campus.

Lisa was frustrated that Terraville Middle School was located in a rough neighborhood because of its negative impact on her schooling. When the school had fire drills and the students walked out of the building "a bunch of guys standing around smoking cigars in the middle of the day" were part of the neighborhood audience which left the students feeling exposed and vulnerable. The gym was run down, and instead of having hardwood floors the floor was concrete with linoleum floor tiles which "hurt a lot" if you fell to the ground during games. Lisa decried the segregation of the magnet program, within the school, because she felt it was a key factor in causing the tension between the AG students and the "neighborhood kids" with whom they only took elective classes. She recalls that there were a lot of fights at the school, and almost all of them involved the neighborhood students because the "AG students" engaged in "a lot of verbal type stuff, but we just didn't fight." These issues which were largely caused by the location of the school, in an economically depressed area of the city, negatively impacted learning opportunities for all students at the school, and detracted from any kind of college preparatory goals that the magnet program may have intended.

Sarah was highly critical of the design and physical features of Lesterview Middle School because the school was not accessible for students with special needs because of the "bunch of stairs" without "any ramps or anything like that." In addition, she disliked the location of the

200

school since "there really is no neighborhood. It's like right in the middle of [town] with like a whole bunch of stores around there." She recalls the modular units on the campus, where the health classes were held, because it "used to be so freaking hot in those little huts and we used to have to go back there and do class anyway." These classroom units had no air conditioning and trying to learn in these spaces was not only a distraction, but also very uncomfortable for Sarah who "was always too hot" when classes were held in these spaces. Sarah expressed similar concerns about the location of Washington High School, which was located along the same busy thoroughfare as Lesterview Middle, because some of her friends lived in the neighborhoods nearby but could not safely walk to school because there "was always a lot of traffic" because two large residential neighborhoods merged onto the same road. While the school's location was favorable for internships, the negatives seemed to outweigh these benefits for Sarah and her friends.

CHAPTER VI: CCR CURRICULUM AND MINORITIZED NC STUDENTS

The data collected from the first and second round interviews, school documents (websites, handbooks, school improvement plans, school report cards, etc.), and the focus group discussion were analyzed, and thirty-one codes were created which represented recurring sentiments and ideas. From this expansive list ten categories were created which represented the broad array of codes initially generated by the first coding pass. These categories were then reviewed to create themes which could be used to address the research questions using statements and data collected during the data collection phase of the research project:

1) How have North Carolina's Native American, African American, and Latinx students been

impacted by the state's College and Career Readiness (CCR) curriculum framework?

a) How do North Carolina's Native American, African American, and Latinx students

perceive the state's CCR curriculum in terms of their educational and career experiences?

b) How are North Carolina CCR curriculum standards reinforced or supported by the

experiences of Native American, African American, and Latinx students?

Five distinct themes (see Table 4.) were used to investigate the impact that the CCR curriculum framework has had upon the lives of North Carolina's minoritized secondary school students. The research questions will be answered using the data which provides insights about the perceptions that the participants have about CCR with regards to their educational attainment and career experiences. Particular attention will be paid to potential disconnects between the state's CCR goals and the experiences of the study participants which either validate or contradict them.

The five themes which will be studied in detail are Educational Practices that Support/Undermine CCR, Personal Responsibility/Initiative, Role of Cultural Awareness and Diversity in CCR Delivery, Secondary School Career Support Structures, and Social Factors

Impacting Minoritized Secondary School Students. A comprehensive analysis of the data should

uncover important insights regarding these themes which capture many of the experiences and

perceptions that the study participants discussed during the interviews and focus group meeting.

Additional data sources which were reviewed included publicly accessible website documents

for the schools that the participants attended, as well as district and state web pages.

Table 4. Themes Generated from Coding

Round 1: Codes	Round 2: Categories	Round 3: Themes
Academic Achievement	Academic Issues	Educational Practices that Support/Undermine CCR
Academic Motivation	Adult Advocates	Personal Responsibility/Initiative and CCR
Academic Pressure	Challenges/Barriers	Role of Cultural Awareness and Diversity in CCR Delivery
Barriers	Career Support	Secondary School Career Support Structures
Career Development	Cultural Awareness	Social Factors Impacting Minoritized Secondary School Students
Career Exploration	Diversity	
Career Guidance	Educational Practices/Issues	
Caring Teachers	Family Involvement	
Challenges in School	Individual Traits	
Cultural Awareness	Social Influences	
Diversity in Schools		
Education Issues		
Educational Practices		
Educational Systems		
Family Influence/Support		
Financial Needs		
Frustrations with School		
Identity		
Influential Adults		
Lack of Support		
Negative Teachers/Staff		
Psychosocial Issues		
Regrets		
Resilience		
Self-Reflection		
Self Doubt		
Social Factors		
Socioeconomics		
Stereotypes		
Stigmas		
Supportive Adults		

Educational Practices that Support/Undermine CCR

Many of the students who participated in the research study expressed a belief that

successful matriculation at a four-year college, and completion of their bachelor's degree was

evidence of college success. This meant that their viewpoint regarding educational CCR

practices were framed around the context of either assisting with this goal or obstructing it. There was minimal discussion regarding careers, as an alternative to college enrollment, because most of them had not reached this juncture where they were trying to chart a career path with their college degrees. Instead, the primary concern was gaining admission to a four-year college and completing their undergraduate degree in as little time as possible. In this regard, CCR was evaluated in terms of the success of the college application process, and the extent to which their secondary education provided the participants with the academic tools and preparation that they needed to be successful in college. The study participants had many perceptions about the educational practices which either helped them with their college pathway, or were instead problematic because they put barriers in their way.

Rigorous Curriculum

Many of the study participants specifically cited a rigorous curriculum, which typically involved a course schedule with honors and AP courses, as one of the most important factors in their CCR during their secondary schooling. Shelby was adamant that she might not have gone to college if it were not for the AP classes that she took, because in other classes students:

> would just like act out and they would talk, and it was just so I couldn't deal with the immaturity…whereas my AP classes they [teachers] were so nice to me because classes were small and they like treated us like adults.

Shelby's recollection of her experiences was telling, because one of the additional advantages that AP classes often offer in high school is smaller class sizes which are a favorable for improved student learning. Sarah also noted this same advantage when she discussed her AP Literature course, which she credits for helping her to prepare for college:

my AP Lit class was small. It was only 13 girls in the class, so we were, and our teacher

was female. So, I feel like we felt really comfortable going to her and talking to her and

asking her for help.

Sarah had similar praise for her AP Language and Composition course which she took

specifically because of the positive things that she had heard about the teacher:

I was really interested in learning from her because she had great reviews and so the

critical thinking skills for sure, the comprehension skills as well. And she also taught us

a lot about learning how to like skim things and be intentional with it. Like not just skim

it because you don't wanna read it, but when you're reading, looking for key things to

pick out that you could possibly use when you go to take different comprehensive. And

that has helped me a lot too.

Beth recalls taking classes which were primarily honors or AP level during high school, and that

the first AP class that she took stood out to her because:

I think the thing that I learned from that course is the level of coursework that comes with

it. So it was rigorous in comparison to like all my previous high school classes up until

that year. But I feel like it kind of introduced me to just how challenging, like the next

level of education can be, because it wasn't quite thinking back now, like in comparison,

it wasn't quite like that of a college course now that I've had multiple years with

experience with college courses. But it was also a step up from what I had typically,

encountered during high school.

Beth also noted that she learned that the AP curriculum presented:

more challenges and it can be more rigorous, but at the same time, it kind of gave me a

little bit of a heads up on how to prepare and how to challenge myself in the ways I

thought about the ideas I was learning, and how to study those concepts that I was

learning.

Ben had similar experiences with his AP and IB courses in high school, because his teachers

helped to prepare him for college success and his AP Language and Composition teacher "was

very down to earth, very realistic, very much so conveying of the attitude of college that it's

really on you and you have to get it done if you want it done." His IB World History teacher

helped him prepare for college in a similar fashion because he "taught in a lecture style, and it

was very helpful for going to class and writing down exactly what the professor says."

David also had a high school experience which was dominated by advanced courses, and he only

recalls taking a single class that was not labeled as either honors or AP:

I don't recall not ever being in an honors course aside from discrete math. Discrete math

was the only one that I wasn't in an honors course for. But yeah, every other class was an

honors course for me and then I had that one AP course.

Anna recalls taking an honors precalculus class with students who had a course load filled with

AP classes and she said that "I remember hearing students who were taking AP classes that were

also taking this honors math class talk about their work, and other classes, and I would always

hear about like how intense it was." She also believes that one of the reasons she initially

enrolled in a community college, rather than a four-year program, was because she did not feel

that she was adequately prepared for college: "I ended up just sticking with honors and I

transferred to a community college after. Cause I didn't think that it would be smart to like go

straight into college." Shelby was frustrated that Burris High School did not offer more AP

classes, but instead chose to focus on providing "stuff like automotive classes and agriculture"

which provided career readiness for students in her rural community.

Curriculum Tracks

What is troublesome for minoritized students and their families, is the importance of being placed in a curriculum track which provides access to a robust and quality curriculum which is truly rigorous, and consequently provides college and career readiness for students. Beth articulated the difference between tracks by saying that the advanced classes were "a little more structured, a little more strict, for lack of a better word" and "the AP classes kind of challenged me to think further or think outside the box about how I learned or some of the things that we were learning." Beth did not realize that she had even been tracked until she got to high school and started taking honors classes. She now realizes that "a lot of the standardized testing that my school had, kind of set me on that path" and this included her End of Grade exams (EOGs) because they would later use these records which demonstrated her proficiency, to "put me on that pathway." Ben was grateful that his parents applied for the Spanish Immersion Program when he was in elementary school because "if you want to stay in it, it already sets you up for a K-12 track, and from there I tested into upper level classes." Anna was aware of the importance of taking AP classes, but she was not allowed to take them because when she transferred to Tennetville High School she did not have the requisite two years of honors classes that the school required:

> My parents told me that I needed to take honors classes and they did mention to me about like the, the tracking system. They wanted me to take like a APUSH or, you know, how they have like middle college classes, but the way that my school had set it up for high school is that you couldn't take APUSH, or not not just APUSH, but AP classes, unless you did like two years of honors. So, when I transferred in I was like a sophomore, and it ended up working out for me because of the years, like I was able to take mainly just

honors classes, but I never made it to AP, which was beneficial to take something more

rigorous, but like, it wasn't as beneficial as other students that like, you know, wouldn't

have to take those college courses.

Anna was clearly aware of the implications of being in a rigorous curriculum, in terms of college

preparation, but she was pushed into a lower academic track because of a technicality associated

with transferring from another high school program. The private school did not provide her with

the necessary honors courses, that would allow her to take classes in Tennetville's highes

academic track. James' experience with a course, in the lower curriculum track, left him bitter

because he felt that the class did not prepare him for college at all:

My math class was probably one of the most underfunded math classes in all of North

Carolina, because simply I was just put in the quote unquote bad student class. So

anytime that new teacher would come in, they would just bully them and make fun of

them until they quit.

These experiences highlight the importance of a rigorous curriculum in terms of college

preparation, but access to this advanced curriculum is often restricted because of tracking

practices in North Carolina's secondary schools, and this potentially undermines the promise of

equitable CCR curriculum delivery for all students.

Elective Curriculum and CCR

Rigorous curriculum was not confined to only core subjects like math, ELA, science, and

social studies, but often involved elective classes which were also key sources of CCR

curriculum. Heather felt that she was was provided with a college readiness curriculum when

she was taking courses that were "more engaging with students" and all students would be better

prepared for college if they were able to take classes including philosophy "because it makes

people more engaged when it comes to critical thinking, and using other thought processes as well." Beth also extolled the benefits of some her elective courses, because she felt that her band classes throughout high school helped to teach her how to collaborate with others in groups:

> I also feel as though band, um, both the class and like the actual marching band helped me to, that was more so like community building for me. And it helped me to learn how to function in an interactive environment or where you might have to work in groups. Say, for instance, if we have mass band practice, then you know, it's 30 to 40 students working together to play one song, but we would also break off into like sectionals. So say the trumpets or the flutes or that sort of thing. It also learned, it taught me how to work in small groups. So I feel like that helped carry over into college. Cause I'm, I'm a person who's not, I'm not the biggest fan of group work, but it has taught me how to, you know, how to navigate it and how to work with others who we might not initially gravitate towards.

Beth also discussed the benefits of music study, in terms of helping her with her math classes since use of beats helped concretize her understanding of math concepts:

> There are certain things that you learn when you're in a musical ensemble or you learn a musical instrument that can, can help you in your everyday life. If I'm being honest, band kind of helped me with math, or like I guess like counting in a way, cuz you had to learn like time signatures and there's not just like the basic four-four beat there's like three-four beats or there's a six-eight beat, or kind of like key changes in those sort of things. So it helped me look at things or numbers in a less theoretical way in a more like hands on way in how to manage them right.

Lisa benefitted from some of the elective STEM classes that she took, when she was at Terraville Middle School, because they helped her to discern what she wanted to study when she went to college; "we had like, you know, engineering focused classes and I did take an engineering focused class and realized that it was not for me." While this may have been a disappointing experience for her, it helped set the path for her to go to Lincoln High School because the pull of the arts disciplines was no longer being offset by the attraction of a STEM program. James would also extoll the benefits of his elective curriculum because his advanced theater course "really helped me with communication with my peers." Thus, while elective courses are often overlooked, when discussing CCR curriculum, they appear to play an important role in the success of college bound students in North Carolina.

Dual Enrollment, Early College, and Middle College Programs

One of the domains of CCR curriculum delivery which appears to be both popular and successful is the "early college enrollment" model which includes the Dual Enrollment, Early College, and Middle College programs which allow students to enroll in college courses while they are still in high school. Most school districts in North Carolina provide access to dual enrollment which is offered by the state through the Career and College Promise (CCP) Program which allows eligible high school students to take CTE and college transfer course free at their local community college. While this program is universal across the state, the accessibility of community colleges is not, since there are only 58 community colleges in the state which are spread across the 100 counties. Many of the larger school districts in North Carolina also offer Early College programs, Middle College programs, or even both, and these programs allow students to take college courses at a local community college, college, or university. Middle College programs in North Carolina typically begin in grade 11, while Early College programs

generally start with the freshman year of high school. In some school districts the terms middle college and early college are interchangeable, and students can begin the program during ninth grade. These programs are appealing because in most cases they provide high school students with exposure to the realities of college courses, while also providing them with the opportunity to earn college credits before they graduate with a high school diploma. Several of the study participants were enrolled in one of these early college exposure programs, and this appears to have been a factor in their successful academic progress in a four-year college program.

James was able to successfully complete precalculus because of dual enrollment and "after I finished that I was, by transcript, qualified for AP calculus" which he did not end up taking during his senior year, because the teacher refused to accept him into the class. Despite this frustrating experience, James was able to satisfy his college math requirements because of the college credit he earned for the class. Jenna attended the STEM program at City Heights Early College and expressed gratitude for some of the experiences which prepared her for post-secondary education:

> I do appreciate the time being on this college campus because it desensitized me to a lot of stuff, so it wasn't unusual for me to be on a college campus later. I knew how to find resources and stuff like that. But I was the second class here, so there was only one class before me. This was a very brand new program.

Sam attended the Jefferson Early College program and he received college preparatory skills because he was taking college courses in the program and they were also taught "basic stuff that we'd have to like learn about college, what we'd have to do, stuff like that." Sam particularly remembers his microeconomics course because it not only gave him insights about "what type of student" he would be in college, but also provided him with practical life skills like "doing your

own taxes or being able to read tax forms." He added that CCR was a constant topic that the teachers at Jefferson Early College were discussing with the students, so he felt that he "heard a lot about my college readiness and stuff like that." These experiences highlight the advantages of the early enrollment college programs, which provide another pathway for accessing rigorous courses while still in secondary school.

Barriers to CCR Delivery in Secondary Education

There are numerous barriers to successful delivery of CCR curriculum in secondary schools, and the study participants highlighted a broad range of education practices which they believe worked to undermine the success of students in both middle school and high school. These practices included a lack of resources for remediation, problematic pedagogical practices, and a failure to teach practical life skills which would benefit all students whether they went on to college or not. The broad range of experiences that the study participants have had, in the many secondary schools they attended, provide insights about some of the CCR challenges being faced in North Carolina's public school systems.

Lack of Commitment to Remediation

One of the challenges in secondary education is providing the necessary resources for students who have fallen behind, and need remediation to catch up with their peers acdemically. When this necessary practice is ignored, students are often tracked into the lowest track which prevents them from being adequately prepared for a college education, or for postsecondary CTE schooling. Beth expressed frustration that a weakness in math, which should have been remediated while in secondary school, often persists and this prevents students from taking classes that they want or need in order to pursue a particular career path:

212

As far as learning the, the material I feel as though there could have been more, I guess

like access to services like tutoring and that sort of thing. I feel like I didn't have enough,

preparation or like help with that. So I was okay enough or I knew enough to kind of like

get by in those classes, but as far as understanding them to where I could use it, like now,

I feel like it, at least my school, was lacking a little bit in that area and sometimes it kind

of caused me to feel like off put or I guess, behind the rest of my peers in that area of

math. And sometimes it has come into play in my college courses, you know, when I had

to take a math class or needed certain maths to take this science or biology course or what

have you. So I feel like the, the lack of resources, I guess is kind of one thing that

affected me.

This is especially true for science majors who must successfully complete calculus in college,

since they often cannot take higher level courses in their field, unless they have successfully

completed this prerequisite with at least a passing grade of a C. Sam expressed similar

sentiments about his high school math teacher who recommended that he drop his class and take

a less rigorous alternative instead, because the teacher "didn't really try to help me get better.

She just kind of told me like, maybe this subject is a bit too advanced for you and kind of just

sent me to the other course." This experience was frustrating because Sam expected her to ask

him "What do you need help with? Like, let's work on this."

Shelby has witnessed the negative effects of a failure to remediate learning loss, in a

timely fashion, since she works as a tutor with middle school students and "for the sixth graders,

most of them are at the third-grade level" for reading. She is not sure whether she is witnessing

one of the impacts from the COVID pandemic, but it has been shocking for her "seeing firsthand,

213

like how behind some of these kids have gotten." This challenge has been especially

problematic for the English Language Learner (ELL) that she works with:

> I'm just wondering sometimes if she is falling behind because of the language thing, even
>
> though they're trying to help her. But it's just crazy like I know on her own, if she has
>
> homework to do or something, it's not like she can read the book herself. So, I don't
>
> know.

Shelby's frustration is palpable because she is involved in the process of attempting to catch

students up who have fallen behind, but the learning gap is so great, that she is not confident that

even her well-intended efforts will be successful.

The Absence of Practical Curriculum in Secondary Schools

Many of the study participants expressed concerns that CCR curriculum should include

teaching a practical curriculum which prepares students both for life in college as well as life

skills which would help all students adjust to life on their own as adults. While the focus was

primarily on financial literacy, courses that were cited as missing from their secondary school

curriculum included classes in cooking, taxes, and even home maintenance. What was most

surprising about their insights, was that they had identified a learning gap which our society

mistakenly believes is being addressed in households. The study participants were adamant that

a lack of practical knowledge was detrimental to their success in college, and this included not

being provided with more information about saving money, by attending a community college,

prior to transferring into a four-year institution of higher learning.

Shelby noted that when she was in secondary school the productivity apps that students

were taught were all part of the Google suite but as she applies for jobs, she realizes that she

should have been exposed to other platforms:

I do wish I was well versed more with Windows type format programming, like

Windows 360. I do not often use Excel. And I see that that is oftentimes something that is

a requirement for people to use. I feel like because I grew up in a younger generation,

most people my age know how to do all things Google.

She also raised the issue of "dual enrollment and like community college and like what it looks

like to get your Associate's degree" as well as complimenting her Civics and Economics teacher

who taught them about banking, and the nuances of government, which she feels are important

skills for adulthood. Sarah also mentioned the need for more financial literacy curriculum during

secondary school, because "there needs to be some kind of class on financial aid, on budgeting

and that type of stuff…and what to expect when you go to college" so that students do not find

out the hard way that they "don't have to take the full loan amount" if their approved student

loan is greater than their actual need. Sarah went even further by saying that she had to learn the

following lesson on her own:

We had to learn things by ourselves. We never were aware. And I know I definitely

wasn't told that you could actually go to community college first for two years, do your

core classes and then transfer into a university. And then like, you know, do your last two

years there and get a bachelors. It would save you so much money and you wouldn't go

into debt, especially if you're somebody who doesn't know what you wanna do at first.

Just being in a community college, and then just doing those general classes could

probably help you.

Sarah's realization that she could have reached her educational goals at a lower cost was an eye-

opener for her, and she attributes this lack of knowledge to a faulty curriculum which is not

training students with the life skills which will be necessary for their futures. Instead, much of

her valuable learning has been the result of learning from experience.

Heather wishes that she had more classes that would have helped with "Managing your

budget and stuff like that and being smart with your money" because she acknowledged that she

still struggles with money management today. She feels that math classes that focus more on

financial skills would have been better than math classes which are "more oriented to people

who want to work with NASA or be like an engineer." Her solution would be providing the

more scientific math classes for people who needed them for their career trajectory, while

offering practical math courses for other students. Ben argued that he "would bring back the old

home economics class and teach everyone how to use an oven and teach everyone…how to use a

banking app" since these tangible skills would be more useful to the lives of adults than some of

the skills being taught in their current curriculum. He also expressed disappointment that

nobody in his secondary schools told him about the "Rule of 15" regarding college credits earned

every semester in order to graduate in four years. This would have been beneficial to him if he

knew it as a freshman, since he would have been more likely to graduate on time with this simple

rule-of-thumb as a guide.

Personal Responsibility, Self-Initiative, and Self-Advocacy

Personal responsibility and self-initiative were often cited by study participants as factors

in their individual college preparedness as well as successful navigation of the college

admissions process. Several of the participants were first-generation college students and

personal initiative was a common trait that was expressed by their narratives regarding their

academic journey. In many cases parents provided guidance to their students, but the students

had to ensure that they were advocating for themselves to ensure that they were not being

negatively affected by some of the barriers that may have impacted their college and career readiness.

Shelby had an opportunity to attend the early college program in her district, but she chose to attend Burris High School, instead, because she was passionate about running "and you can't do sports in Early College." This was a pivotal decision for her, since she knew that the early college would provide a better CCR curriculum, and she was fortunate that cross-country recruiters would push her to attend a four-year university. Shelby described her experience in high school as follows:

> I felt like a lot of students have to be like self-sufficient into like figuring out, because I know that, because I came from a background that dealt with like low income. I had to like often talk to the school counselor to get waivers for applying to universities and stuff like that. And I felt like there was a huge gap, because a lot of students were doing way more beneficial things than what I felt like I was.

While Shelby would take the initiative, to successfully navigate the college admissions process, she is painfully aware that she missed out on a lot of opportunities because there were many programs that she did not find out about until it was too late:

> I had learned, like in my senior year about dual enrollment, like doing community college classes and you know, also being in school and then about AP credits. I felt like there was just a lot of, like you had to know someone to get into those spaces that would benefit you later on or, I don't know, you just had to know about it to talk about it. And I felt like I didn't know anyone going in.

Shelby's high level of self-awareness has led her to an understanding about the programs that might have been beneficial for her college readiness, as well as the importance of having

217

knowledgeable advocates who would provide valuable CCR information in a timely manner. She is grateful for the advocates that she had, who included teachers and coaches, but she is also cognizant of the many opportunities that she missed because she did not have access to all the information that might have been beneficial for her CCR pathway.

Jenna echoed similar sentiments about self-advocacy, but she felt that her advisors were not as helpful as they could have been because they felt that she had everything under control:

> I will say that she, and this has actually kind of been like a thing throughout my schooling in general, at least middle school to, uh, high school in now that I've kind of always been my own, had to be my own advocate. So, you know, most of the time my advisors kind of just sit back, they're like, oh, you're the easiest student I've ever had. But sometimes that comes to my detriment because there are things that I do need to know, even though I've got certain things done already. And because they take a back seat in that aspect, sometimes I miss out on things.

Jenna's assessment of the hidden cost of her self-advocacy was revealing because it was obvious that she had picked up on one of the dynamics that existed in her relationship with teachers and staff while she was in secondary school. Jenna mentioned that her mother was her advocate while she was in elementary school, and was careful to make sure that she was being provided with the appropriate curriculum, but she would take this responsibility upon her own shoulders as she continued through secondary school.

Another student who expressed a high level of self-reliance was Sarah, who says that she and her classmates at Washington High School were forced to figure things out on their own, but this developed their self-sufficiency and willingness to work together for the same goals:

218

When it came to high school, I feel like one of the biggest things we had to learn to do

was be self-sufficient because we were limited on resources as far as like guidance

counselors and things like that. Nobody was really around to show us, this is what you

need to do in order for you get to college. We pretty much like one person would

probably find out, and we kind of pretty much had to figure out for ourselves. So I would

say it definitely made us more self-sufficient in the fact that we didn't wait around for

someone to show us how to apply, or what to do. We pretty much had to like pick

ourselves up and figure it out ourselves.

While Sarah expressed a certain amount of pride regarding their ability to navigate the college

admissions process, she was also critical because she believes that this laissez faire attitude, on

the part of the school counselors, may have negatively impacted some of the students because

"We were not ready" and "I don't feel like that should have been their fault. I feel that they

should have been prepared." Sarah's criticism was especially focused on her belief that there

were not enough guidance counselors to adequately serve the school's population with fidelity.

Beth credits her focus on college enrollment on the honors English classes that she took

while she was in high school, because she enjoyed them tremendously and this would later lead

her to change her undergraduate major from Music Education to English. The AVID program

also contributed to her goal setting because of the personal responsibility which the program

emphasized, as well as the practical study skills and organizational strategies that would help her

as she advanced through both secondary school and college. The program also encouraged her

to focus on her application portfolio in order to successfully compete with other students:

I think in a way it kind of helped when it came time for me to apply to colleges, it helped

a lot of us because you know, we have to have these extra curriculars and we have to

219

have these grades because you never know who else might have the same grades as you

or might have the same amount of activities as you. So that's why you always have to

push a little bit further to set yourself apart from everybody.

One of the primary benefits of AVID participation, for Beth, was the practice of self-evaluation

as well as the ambition to set oneself apart from a wide field of similar applicants, who might be

competing for the same enrollment slots in college.

Anna felt that her guidance counselor "was helpful" but did not provide the "continual

support" that students needed during the application process. As a consequence, she "did a lot of

research" on her own, and relied on her parents and older siblings for support. She recalls

feeling that some of her classmates "benefited from interacting with him [counselor] more" and

that she felt that she was always a step behind her classmates because they were already

announcing their college acceptances on the counseling center bulletin board, and she had no

idea where she was going to attend college. Ben's attitude about being self-reliant was cavalier,

largely because of the style of his high school guidance counselor who he worked with since his

freshman year:

[He] was very realistic and very laid back. And again, just really conveyed like the, the

idea of like, the support system exists, but this is something you have to accomplish. This

is something you have to do.

These narratives suggest that successful college matriculation was the consequence of CCR

exposure, as well as the ability and willingness to shoulder responsibility, when guidance

resources were either limited or unavailable. The study participants were keenly aware of their

own individual roles in the college application process, but many of them also expressed a

220

concern that they did not have adequate access to all of the resources necessary to ensure that the process was smoothly executed.

Role of Cultural Awareness and Diversity in CCR Delivery

There is evidence that suggests that both cultural awareness and student diversity impact the delivery of CCR curriculum in North Carolina's secondary schools, as well as the experiences of minoritized students. The study participants had a wide range of interactions that had racial/ethnic undertones and this pattern appeared in schools that were both majority Caucasian as well as schools that might be considered majority-minority because Caucasian students did not represent at least fifty percent of the population in the school. It is important to note that a majority-minority school simply has a simple majority of students (greater than 50%) who are not Caucasian, and this means that the minoritized population is not likely to be homogeneous. The study participants provided valuable information regarding their experiences with inequitable access to advanced curriculum, stereotyping, preferential treatment, military recruitment, and the intersectionality of race/ethnicity and socioeconomic status.

Inequitable Access to an Advanced Curriculum

One of the challenges for successful CCR delivery in secondary education is the perceived lack of equitable access to an advanced curriculum because of the racial/ethnic factors. Shelby noted that "there was maybe like a little more representation" of minoritized students in honors classes, as opposed to AP courses, but most minoritized students were being placed in the regular classes:

I started off all regular classes because my middle school teacher told me, like I wasn't smart enough to be able to do like any of the honors or AP. And then I got to high school my freshman year. I was like, oh this is actually, these classes are pretty easy for me. I

221

don't know why I didn't do honors in the first place. So then the next year I started doing

like honors and AP.

Jenna expressed disappointment that the City Heights STEM Program enrollment demographics

had changed since she attended since "a majority of my class was Black. Now I know for a fact

that STEM is no longer like that. There are not as many Black kids there because of kind of how

they've reworked that program." Lisa noticed that while Lincoln High School "was actually a

very diverse high school…my honors and AP classes [were] still predominantly White" and

Anna, who was not able to take AP courses because of her transfer from another high school

"hung out with other Black and Brown students, [who] were not taking those classes." Anna

also noted that she "knew like one girl who was Black that was in like an AP History class, but

that was it." Heather had recollections that echoed Anna's observations and she noted that "AP

classes that I was in, or honors, like AP psychology or honors English classes that I was in, then

it was predominantly White." While these andecdotal statements only show a pattern of low

minoritized student enrollment in advanced courses, James recalls the stigma attached to taking a

single low-level math class early in high school. Once you took a lower level math class, during

the early years of high school, it was impossible to get back into the advanced track to take AP

calculus before graduation. Lisa first noticed a questionable placement pattern when she was at

Terraville Middle School:

> And getting that higher level experience, but being a Black girl, you know, it was kind of
>
> crazy because you go and you're in these higher level classes and there's not a lot of
>
> children of color in those classes. You know, there's like a few Black kids, you know, a
>
> lot of, you know, Asian kids, but not that many Black and Hispanic kids.

Sarah had similar experiences and she said "while I feel like some of the high schools promoted college and career readiness it definitely wasn't equitable." Beth expressed a belief that culturally responsive teaching practices might have helped to improve CCR for minoritized students:

> And it's not to say that they didn't have the academic capability because you know, we all learn in different ways, but that's also the other side of that coin. Like the ways that they might have needed to learn weren't offered and then those steps might not have been taken to see, okay, well these students learn differently or they're not, they're behind the curve of everyone else. So how can we help them? I feel like those steps weren't taken, but more could have been done.

These perceptions of inequitable placement policies, which were limiting minoritized students from access to an advanced curriculum, created frustration for several of the study participants who acknowledged the possibility that race, or ethnicity, may have impacted their access to meaningful college readiness coursework.

Stereotyping Minoritized Students

Stereotyping students, based upon their racial or ethnic characteristics, was also a concern that was expressed by some of the participants in the study, especially because of the intersectionality with poverty. Beth noticed that "it's not just…African American students who suffer from a lack of resources" but also many of her other classmates who attended her secondary schools where minoritized students constituted the majority of enrollment. Shelby articulated a similar observation when she discussed the need for more effective mentorship:

> The person of color thing, it's like there's so many different individual experiences under like the category of person of color, because there could be person of color who has like a

language problem or somebody who's like from a poor, it could be like a tax bracket

thing.

Jenna was disappointed in her counselor because she felt that she was not concious of the

challenges that some minoritized students faced while in school:

Sometimes I did feel like she was a little unaware of some of the advice she would give.

Just due to like when I say unaware, I mean like she's talking to a student of color about

like finances, because they're concerned. I was concerned about like taking AP classes in

addition to working, and her advice would be, well maybe stop working. But based off

of, you know, my socioeconomic status, not working is not necessarily an option.

This lack of cultural awareness caused Jenna to feel alienated from her counselor whom she felt

was "really nice" and echoed James' disappointment that the school administration at Buffington

High School seemed oblivious to "the racial implications of having the low, basically the low

income class and the high income class" mixing together at a majority-minority campus. Jenna

recalls being a "minority in both socioeconomics and race" at Arbor Village High School and

how she was callously singled out, along with the other African American seniors in her

graduating class, when they were called to the office to receive information about a scholarship

opportunity for which they were uniquely qualified because they were Black.

Sam was grateful for one of his history teachers who opened the "predominantly black"

classroom room up for conversations about the students' personal experiences so that students

could "talk a lot about our own experiences, what we'd seen in our lives, stuff like that." This

example of culturally responsive teaching was not the norm, but it helped Sam deal with

stereotypes that he faced because of his West African heritage and his classmates "not

understanding like Africans are all different." Shelby faced similar challenges with stereotyping

224

because of her Hispanic heritage and she noted that she felt "a little weird about it, because I don't speak Spanish and I'm just very like Americanized." Ben also dealt with issues of identity and stereotyping because of his fair skin, which he acknowledges provided him with "the privileges of being a White passing individual" despite his first generation Mexican background. These experiences highlight the role that a racial or ethnic identity can play in schooling because interpersonal exchanges can be influenced by perceptions that influence relationships in a school setting.

Preferential Treatment

Culturally responsive teaching can be beneficial for minoritized students, but one of the challenges that has been identified as problematic is the preferential treatment that some students receive in terms of college preparedness and access to academic resources. Jenna expressed irritation that "Brown Asians…because they were the majority" were receiving extra attention and resources at Arbor Village High School where she finished her high school studies:

I will say a lot of the advising was catered to them, and their learning styles, and most of their cultural career trajectories, whereas not all of us were on that path of, you know, going to Duke and NC state and Chapel Hill.

Jenna acknowledges that this extra attention was likely because these classmates were ambitious, and had higher grade point averages, but this dynamic was occurring along racial fault lines, so it was a frustrating experience for her. Lisa recalled a similar dynamic with her high school counselor at Lincoln High School:

My counselor was, she was a lot. She was a middle-aged White woman, often lofty. Loved the preppy White kids. I did not personally have a problem and I think it's because I was in these honors and AP classes. I know for certain, I did have friends who

225

were not necessarily taking all honors and AP classes that had the same counselor that I

did, where she was not really giving them as much college preparation and college

assistantance.

Her counselor probably did not realize that Lisa and her friends perceived a differential in their

relationship with her, but this could have been symptomatic of racially indifferent behavior. She

also felt that the rosters of many of the college readiness programs were dominated by Caucasian

students which she believed was a sign that "college and career readiness seems to target a

certain set of demographics." Ben recalled differences in the level of expectations that teachers

and staff had for "White passing Hispanics" because they were being grouped with the White

students in the advanced curriculum and "they definitely expected more of us." These patterns

of discriminatory treatment, whether in terms of expectations, or access to resources, are

problematic because of the impact that it can have on the CCR trajectories of the affected

students.

Military Recruitment Bias

During the focus group discussion, the three participants reported concerns that they were

being selectively targeted for military recruitment, while in high school, and many of them felt

that this was primarily because of stereotyping due to either their race or ethnicity, and the

percieved linkage to low socioeconomic status. Lisa acknowledged that she was suspicious that

minoritized students were being purposefully targeted for recruitment:

I don't know if like they're in cahoots with the military recruiters because the military

recruiters at the school knew exactly who to come up to and say, "Hey, you know, are

you interested in joining the military? We can pay for your college. What's up?" So, it's

absolutely not equitable at all.

Heather expressed similar concerns based upon her personal experiences at Lincoln High School where recruiters seemed to focus their attention on the minoritized student population:

> I'm gonna say…I do think there are some collaboration going on cuz a lot of times they'll like intentionally target minority communities, or students with lower GPAs and people that aren't, you know, academically outstanding.

Heather was repeatedly approached by military recruiters at school, and they even spoke to her, and other students in her computer class, without realizing that this group of students was composed of high achievers who "had the highest number of scholarships that even came to the school" and were awarded "half a million dollars" by colleges her senior year.

Sarah discussed her belief that military recruiters seemed to believe that minoritized students and their families had less information about funding college and would be more likely to enlist in the hopes of receiving GI Bill funding for college in the future:

> Like it was said as well, going home and sharing that with your family who may not have had a college career, they don't know, and they want that for you. They're not sure what the best way is to go. Maybe they don't know about financial aid and stuff like that because that stuff is true, because we didn't know about financial aid and it kind of is like, again, it's just a fear mongering, like a knee jerk reaction.

Sarah feels that Washington High School, which was close to a military base, "pushed the military agenda a lot" and they almost talked her into enlisting, but her father intervened, and she changed her mind. Lisa also voiced a suspicion that the military was seizing upon stereotypes about minoritized families, as well as real challenges that they face:

> They know that they can prey on that community because of the systemic issues that we have. And you know, the history, like all the oppression that they deal with that causes

Black and Brown children to be already, you know, parents not going to college, or

haven't been to college and you know like struggling at home, just having things in their

environment that are making it hard for them to be so focused on school to go to college.

These concerns have validity because it has been a common strategy of military recruiters to

divert students of lower socioeconomic backgrounds towards military "careers" by using the

promise of free tuition, after they have served their enlistment, as an enticement. When this

aggressive recruitment environment is coupled with the access that armed services recruiters

have to student high school records, it is easy to understand why the study participants felt

targeted when they were in high school. As they would later explain, it was their family social

capital which was conveyed during discussions with their parents, which caused them to steer

clear of the alluring promises that the military was making.

While military recruitment was generally looked upon unfavorably by the majority of the

study's participants, enlistment opportunities can often provide opportunity for others who are

not interested in, or prepared for, attending college. This was especially the case for my wife's

uncles who all joined the military after graduating from high school in the U.S. Virgin Islands.

There were few job opportunities for them on the island of St. Thomas, and the military provided

them with the opportunity to leave the island, travel, and establish themselves financially,

without attending college. Ironically, these three uncles are the most financially stable members

of the six siblings, second only to an aunt who went to Michigan to pursue an undergraduate

degree. This experience is probably typical for many young adults today, since the military

might not seem attractive when compared against attending a four-year university, but it is

probably a better option than working part-time in a minimum wage job.

There are other options, with regards to military enrollment which were not addressed during the focus group meeting or individual interviews. Once a student has committed to university studies they can pursue both a military career and a college degree simultaneously through appointment to one of the service academies, ROTC, or a host of other programs which provide tuition and fee assistance for students who are completing a college degree. When I was a freshman in college I was recruited by the Marines for the Platoon Leader Corps and I would have been commissioned as a second lieutenant upon graduation with my undergraduate degree. This program was unique because it did not provide tuition assistance during college, but instead provided paid summer employment while completing basic training, Officer Candidate School, and earning a pilot's license with fees paid by the government. There was no commitment to enlist, until graduation from college, when I would decide whether to accept my commission as an officer, or pursue a career as a civilian. This program was attractive to me as a freshman in college because it guaranteed high summer pay for the training programs, paid for my pilot's license, and would have provided me with an opportunity at flight school to be a Marine pilot. I walked away from the program, at the end of the application process, because I was sufficiently exposed to the Marine lifestyle to understand that it conflicted with the stable family life which I desired, because the Marines put the corps before everything else.

Secondary School Career Support Structures

Another domain of CCR delivery, which needs to be examined, is the role that support structures such as caring adults, professional staff, third party support organizations, and engaged parents play while students are progressing through secondary education in North Carolina. While many of the participants in this study were effective at advocating for themselves, they openly acknowledged the assistance that was provided by others to help them navigate through

229

secondary school and apply for college admission. Several study participants were grateful for

the additional resources provided by adults who were working on their behalf, or programs

which prepared them for rigorous academic courses, since these resources were helpful during

their academic journeys.

Adult Advocates

Shelby recalls several teachers advocating for her while she was in high school including

her math teacher who made sure she was on the honors track her sophomore year:

He was like, "Oh you're definitely gonna be in honors next year. Right. Like you, your

grades are too good." Like you shouldn't be like they were, they basically the teachers I

took, told me and like even my freshman year of high school this was actually very

encouraging. Because, like I was saying, besides like athletics, I kind of didn't really plan

on going college

She also received college admissions assistance from her guidance counselor whom she

described as a "super young Black woman who had just graduated from college and for some

reason was working at Burris High." According to Shelby, "she made like a huge difference in

helping me with the whole process and getting me letters of recommendation" in addition to

helping her understand the differences between subsidized and unsubsidized loans and the

interest rate differences that could cost her money. Shelby had expressed disappointment in the

level of college preparation that Burris High School provided for her, but she acknowledges that

she "did have really great teachers" who were "super helpful in preparing me" because "they

knew what the goal was." She also was grateful for the teachers whom she felt "went out of their

way to support me" because they were often the most involved staff on the campus who were

always going above and beyond to help the school outside their primary responsibilities of teaching.

Sam credits his parents, as well as some of his teachers, for pushing him to take a more rigorous curriculum track while he was still in middle school:

I would say it was probably a bit of a mix between my parents and the school system, because when I was in middle school, I did really well in my courses. So I eventually, I was pretty much like a B student. So I did really well. Eventually it got to where my teachers started recommending to my parents that I take harder courses because I was more advanced. So when I got into middle school, I started out taking, I don't remember specifically what class, but I started taking out harder maths and like higher level history courses and English courses.

The school librarian at Plains Middle School was also an adult advocate for Sam because she told him that he "should maybe look into like middle college, or early college, instead of just going to a regular high school" since she told him "that will help you in the future." She also wrote a recommendation for him after he spoke to his parents, and they agreed to support his new plan for high school. Anna also developed a strong relationship, with the librarian at her high school, and she helped Anna learn how to "practice different skills with, I guess like research and learning how to like use the library." Anna remembers having minimal contact with the guidance counselors at Tennetville High School, since she only recalls interacting with them when she needed waivers for her college applications.

Beth recalls the support from her English teachers who nurtured her passion for the subject with their feedback on her papers and projects:

231

I feel like I took that recognition and discernment a long way, and not only taking what

other people have seen in my work and started to see it for myself. And that ultimately

kind of like pushed me to, I guess like challenge myself more, because the teachers I had

in high school, they were very much no nonsense kind of teachers. But they also were

thoroughly and genuinely engaged with the students and the thoughts they had to share,

and I feel like that kind of created space for me to recognize what that environment could

feel like, and then especially moving forward on a college level.

She also credits the demographics of the school counselors at Western High School for opening

doors for "female African American students" because they were young African American

women in their late 20s to early 30s who not only promoted college readiness, but also other

"things that they didn't think they would be prepared for." Not only were these adult advocates

helping to prepare Beth for college, but they were also imparting valuable social capital to help

her, and her classmates, as they transitioned both to college and adulthood.

Sarah was extremely critical of the guidance counselors at Washington High School

because she felt her teachers did a better job of providing critical information for students:

Because we truly didn't even really know what they did. Like our teachers that we had,

whether we had a good relationship or not, they were the ones that's like, "Hey, the SAT

stuff is coming up are, are you all like prepping? Did you turn in your paperwork to the

office so that way we can make sure that you take the test." Like they were pretty much

the ones telling us that stuff.

She also credits her National Forensics League coach for providing her with invaluable

information about going to college and the importance of making good decisions:

She would be coaching me on the weekends and she was pretty much the one who was like, "you know, I just wanted to let you know how it is." She's like, "people think you go to college and you do great. She was like, that's that's not all life is." She's like, "college is not like" she explained to us, she's like, you know, "college is not all like parties and having a good time." She's like, "you know, you'll get loans, don't spend them all. Save your money"… Like, she explained stuff to us like she was like, "you know, don't be intimidated by the college."

The informal mentoring provided by her Forensics League coach, when combined with the updates and deadline guidance from teachers, provided Sarah with considerable information to assist with both the application process and the process of surviving in college.

Both Lisa and David cited the role that parents played in preparing for careers and college. David's father encouraged him to pursue a career in healthcare because "the human body never changes" and Lisa has noticed the difference in outcomes between "parents that are encouraging their kids to dream big versus parents who…are not encouraging, or are so busy with, you know, trying to get the bills paid that they don't have time to encourage their kids." Lisa was careful to acknowledge that some of the parental neglect is not intentional, and is the consequence of challenges being faced in the household, and this highlights the importance of advocating adults in the schools since parents often need help providing the support which is necessary to ensure successful outcomes for their children.

College and Career Readiness Programs

There were several CCR programs cited by the study participants as beneficial for college and career preparation, in addition to the early and middle college programs mentioned earlier. Programs such as HOSA, AVID, and High School Connections received credit for their roles in

233

preparing students for future career opportunities as well as success in post-secondary education. The HOSA and High School Connections programs are similar to each other because they primarily focus on career exploration and preparedness, while the AVID program is primarily focused on college preparatory skills which would later lead to career development during completion of an undergraduate degree.

David was encouraged to join HOSA because of his interest in the healthcare field and his Nursing Fundamentals teacher at Plover High School who pushed him to excel. David was able to complete his CNA certification, while he was still in high school, and despite completing two bachelor's degrees, he still falls back on his CNA license when he needs higher paying jobs. While David would likely have completed his CNA program, without participating in the HOSA program, the experience not only increased his engagement, but also pushed him to excel because of the competitions; "There was six of us competing in state, and my competition was like CNA competency, and I was the only one out of that entire group that made it to internationals." His teacher was the HOSA faculty leader and David realized that "she was very strict" because she wanted her students to enjoy success. The combination of his teacher's high expectations, and the competitive nature of the HOSA program, were key factors in David's successful career as a CNA.

The High School Connections Program at Washington High School provided Sarah with the opportunity to also earn her CNA license, while she was in high school, but it was much broader in scope and partnered students at her school with various local businesses so that they could work in internships and receive on-the-job training for a potential career. The program also included training for careers in childcare and preparation to become licensed as a manicurist:

234

They had nail tech classes you could do, that a lot of the girls did. And then they had a

daycare one as well. They partnered up with the daycare across the street, which made it

easily accessible for a lot of the students who wanted to be, and get that daycare credit

because you know, we all might not have a car, which was the case for a lot of us.

Washington High School took advantage of its location on a busy commercial boulevard

to arrange internships with local businesses to expand the career opportunities of its students who

needed training, and experience, before they entered the workforce. Heather was also enrolled in

a CNA program while she was in high school, and she worked in a retirement home to satisfy the

requirements of her internship. She is still impacted by this experience because it continues to

influence her career decisions:

So taking the courses of, you know, the health science classes, and then the nursing class

that I took to get my CNA license, those really influenced me, to, you know, still

implementing, the career choice that I'm currently now studying. So, I'm still trying to be

in the medical field.

Heather, Sarah, and David all completed their CNA programs in high school, but Sarah and

Heather used internships to develop and refine their skills, while David used the HOSA program

and its skills competitions, for the same purpose. All spoke highly of their programs and the

impact that they had as they continued to make career decisions as adults. These experiences

highlight the value of career development programs which can be implemented in high schools

to provide career exploration and training opportunities.

Technical Careers and Community Colleges

Community colleges were frequently discussed by the study participants for their role in

career and college readiness for a host of reasons including technical training for skilled trades

careers, dual enrollment opportunities, and post-secondary education as an alternative to immediate matriculation at a four-year institution. There was widespread agreement, amongst the participants, that community colleges do not receive adequate attention for the crucial service that they provide in enabling many students to transition to undergraduate degrees, and this was a surprising discovery during the research project. Several individuals also expressed frustration that students who initially attend community colleges, after graduating from high school, often receive criticism for this decision because of the lower status associated with this alternative higher education pathway.

Community College Pathways

Anna did not feel prepared to go directly to a four-year college when she graduated from Tennetville High School, and did not get accepted into her school of choice, so she decided to enroll at a community college:

It was a unique situation, but I ended up just sticking with honors and I transferred to a community college after. Cause I didn't think that it would be smart to like go straight into college if it wasn't like what I wanted. I wanted to go to this particular university, but that didn't work out. And even though I had like a high enough GPA, that pathway didn't work out. So, it was weird because I felt I had done everything right. You know, I'd had like good classes. I'd had like a good GPA, and I was relatively doing great in school. Like I, I did different clubs and stuff, but for me it just, I don't know the odds weren't in that favor.

Her experience is particularly revealing because she had previously expressed her opinion that her high school had not properly prepared her for college, so it appears that she took the initiative to use her community college to bridge the gap. Anna's approach was successful, since she not

236

only completed her undergraduate degree at a four-year college, but she is currently preparing to start a master's degree program. Lisa also attended a community college, after leaving her four-year college after the first semester, and she lamented the "shame" that many students attach to community college attendance:

> I remember when I graduated high school I was set to go to a four year, got there, hated it, hated my first semester. I was like, I wanna go home, I wanna take a semester off. And my parents were like, "Okay, you can come home but you're not gonna just sit at home. You need to do something, you need to go to community college." And like deep down, I felt like I had failed. I was like, I just dropped out of this four-year that I told everybody I was going to, and I'm going to community college for a semester. I was like, am I a failure?

Like Anna, Jenna also attended a community college after she graduated from high school and she believes it was one of her best decisions:

> I actually went to community college, and in hindsight that was probably the best thing that I ever did, cost wise and just maturity wise. Coming out of high school I don't think I should have gone to a four-year university, and I know I didn't and just like how would you know? But yeah, based off of where I was coming out of high school, I think community college was the best decision that anyone can make.

After a successful experience at her community college, Jenna transferred into a four-year university, and like Anna, she successfully completed her undergraduate program.

Heather was disappointed that her high school guidance counselors did not provide meaningful information about the community college pathway to students for whom it may have been beneficial:

237

I think that like students should be educated about like community college more often. A

lot of counselors push for four-year universities when like even if you're in like a

financial situation that is way more feasible and you can like get halfway there to getting

your, you know, four-year degree. Yes, there's definitely a stigma with it and like a lot of

kids who do come from lower income want to make their families proud. They want to,

you know, achieve those things that their families weren't able to, and they just want to

be better off. Not knowing that like being in debt in that way is not the only opportunity.

You can go to community college, you can go to trade school, you can look at internships

and like that is not communicated to most students.

Heather reiterated the issue of the stigma attached to community colleges and the barrier that this

often creates, to the detriment of students who are not blessed with abundant financial resources.

Shelby also noticed this dynamic, and she recalled the pride associating with attending a four-

year college or university:

I do remember a lot of friends choosing to go like a different path than college, or if they

did, going to community college. But I do remember it being like, for the most part, like

it was an exciting thing to say that you were going to a four year university.

Many of the study participants either attended a community college while in high school for

dual-enrollment, or after graduation as they transitioned to traditional colleges and universities.

Their experiences suggest that North Carolina's community college system is a valuable asset for

providing college and career opportunities for minoritized students who face a challenge with

paying for college.

Trade Schools and Careers in Technical Fields

Another domain of CCR, that was discussed during interviews, was the topic of technical education and careers working in the trades. While all the study participants had successfully matriculated to a four-year university or college, and over half of them had completed their undergraduate degrees, many of them strongly felt that the career needs of secondary school students were not being fully addressed. This appeared to be the consequence of a bias towards college enrollment, which was diverting guidance resources from providing additional services, and career options, for students at their high schools. This critical awareness, about the breadth of employment opportunities, was surprising, but speaks highly for this group of socially aware college educated adults.

Sarah felt it was important to "give praise to a different career" because "learning a trade is not insignificant" and the ability to engage in construction "is a very marketable trade." Lisa recalls her grandfather's experience when he came home from serving in Vietnam:

He came back and didn't go back to school or anything like that. He learned to be a carpenter. He like, and he can now build like he's built garages onto his homes and like whole extra floors and stuff. And that's something that you can do for your life and you have that skill and it is super marketable. They don't tell you about that in school.

She wishes more school counselors would advertise alternative career pathways to students in secondary school because they could "make tons of money doing that in like a less amount of time." Shelby's opinion supported this viewpoint since she felt students did not "have to have it all together at that instant" when they were seniors in high school, but could consider "even like trade school" if they desired. Simply put, college might not be the best option for all students as they transition into adulthood and the workforce.

It should be noted however, that careers in the military and fast food industry were not generally viewed in a positive light by the study participants who were tired of the constant recruitment pitches by the armed services, and discussed working at a fast food restaurant after graduation as demeaning. Sarah described the tension when students from her high school would see recent graduates working at McDonalds and they would joke around with them using comments like "Why is you working here? Like, you still at McDonalds?" She expressed a similar sentiment regarding some of the males in her graduating class who would say "Well, I might just go to the military, because I can't go to college." These anecdotes suggest an important lesson, which points to the failure of CCR curriculum if many students end up working in the fast-food industry or enlisting in the military because they did not go to college, and they were not prepared for pursuing a career in a technical industry.

Social Factors Impacting Minoritized Secondary School Students

One of the challenges for minoritized secondary school students, in North Carolina, is the social factors which impact their access to equitable CCR curriculum. The study participants raised several concerns about the impact that these factors might have with regards to their ability to engage college and career readiness curriculum, and enjoy better lives because of this. Various externalities including low socioeconomic status, social capital deficits, failing schools, low expectations of minoritized students, and district zoning decisions all appeared to be factors which could distort the intended outcomes of CCR curriculum in North Carolina.

Several of the study participants discussed the challenges that low socioeconomic status posed not only for them, but also for their classmates when they were in secondary school. One of the reasons this is a particularly poignant issue is that virtually all of the factors being

240

discussed are often aligned with low levels of income. Lisa captured this succinctly when she made the following observation:

It's always interesting that a lot of people do not understand how much, you know, environments tend to impact people. And I think that the college readiness, at least in North Carolina, first and foremost, is like dependent on the school. So some schools can choose not to have it or maybe don't have enough staff to implement some kind of college readiness. But also the curriculums assume that, a lot of kids come from homes where the parents either went to college or have a lot of knowledge of what college looks like, and that these kids have like access to all of this information, which you know, it puts people at a disadvantage when you don't have this information.

Lisa was able to capture the influence of four factors that potentially impact CCR curriculum with her observation about parents who might not have attended college and did not have sufficient social capital to assist their children with the college admissions process. She also hinted at the possibility that they might also have low socioeconomic status and live in a neighborhood which is zoned for attendance at an inferior school. This combination of factors can be typical for minoritized students who might face a host of additional challenges including housing and food security as well as exposure to violence. Anna mentioned the efforts that her parents made on her behalf to keep her out of the neighborhood schools:

They looked at magnet schools, public schools, private schools, charter schools, to make sure that I could be prepared for college. They always encouraged me to go to the library to read books. They got tutors. They did everything that they could because they know that like in the surrounding communities, like the schools that were like Title I schools, they weren't as like sufficient in preparing students. We had to be bused and zoned in

different areas, and I know that unfortunately many parents may not know about like the complexity of like the [school] system. So, like I'm grateful that my parents did all that they had to, but it's also crazy that like, that's what it requires if you're like in a certain like zoning.

It appears that Anna's family lived in a neighborhood which was zoned into less desirable schools, but they had the social capital necessary to work around this challenge and find ways for their children to have access to secondary schools which provided CCR curriculum. Heather also mentioned that she was watching a news story about school redistricting in one of North Carolina's larger cities and how "a lot of parents are concerned about how that's going to affect funding for different schools. Sarah saw a similar pattern before she graduated from Washington High School when new district zoning lines were drawn:

The kids who were living on the side, like literally a side, literally a side of the neighborhood who are more affluent now had to go to a different school. So it's like you take away the opportunity for children to not only be able to be friends and potentially be able to meet other kids who are in a different bracket than them so they can experience new things.

This decrease in diversity, at her high school, is problematic because it fundamentally generates a form of economic segregation which can also be reflected along racial and ethnic lines. Ben described the positive aspects of the diversity he saw at Chamberlain High School because of the large number of "lower income families," since "it readied him for being socialized and being able to communicate with my peers and people that weren't [like him]."

Low expectations of students of color, or low socioeconomic status, was a challenge that was discussed by Beth who felt that this was one of the drawbacks of attending a "predominantly Black" high school:

I feel like there's not a lot of expectation as there might be with like other demographics, or you know, sometimes they don't expect students who are African American or students of color to kind of rise up to the standards that are initially set. So I feel like the regular classes in high school were just kind of, I don't wanna say pass times, but you know, it was just like, okay, do the work and then you're in and you're out.

These low expectations, if widespread, would hamper efforts to provide minoritized students with CCR opportunities with the justification that they could not handle the challenges of increased rigor in their courses. James felt that the decision to keep him out of AP Calculus was largely made because of his demographics which were not only ethnic but also characterized by "income because I lived in a single parent household" with a "mom that never shows up." Jenna believes that low expectations for minoritized students is pervasive all the way up to higher education because of an "unwritten rule about HBCUs and how they're viewed in the workforce, you know, they're not always valued." Shelby expressed the issue of low expectations in a different manner, by critiquing her rural community for its lack of ambition:

I hate, I don't know, it's not like positive. I just feel like a lot of people out there when I like see it. It's just everyone's like, everyone my age already has a family and they're like living in a house and there's a lot of, I don't know, like younger girls dating older guys and getting pregnant.

Shelby clearly disliked being associated with some of the negative characteristics of her community, which she believed reflected on her poorly, despite her academic accomplishments

and this highlights the problem with stereotypes that lead to low expectations from a particular group or community.

Sarah believed that some of the dynamics of the "Black and Brown community" like the "very strong sense of family" were valuable, but created a "vulnerability" because college bound students did not want to have their "mom and dad go into debt" to pay for their college dreams. This dynamic meant that they were more susceptible to diversion to both the military and the workplace, rather than going straight to college when they graduated. Heather resolved this problem by taking on the expenses personally by taking on "a lot of debt of my own" which she hoped to "offset in the future" when she completed her college degree. Her conclusion was "What do you want? Do you want debt now, or do you want debt later?" Sarah voiced a concern about job opportunities for students who graduated from her high school without college or career readiness because of students she knew who were still working at McDonalds four years after they had graduated from high school. She fretted that "No Child Left Behind" should have an asterisk because for many of her classmates the choice "is like either the military or it's a prison pipeline."

The intersectionality between economic status and race/ethnicity has clearly been a significant factor in college and career readiness outcomes for minoritized secondary school students in North Carolina. This common duality impacts social capital, school zoning, expectations, and even employment opportunities when students graduate and enter the workforce. The study participants were able to articulate many of the experiences that either they or their classmates had during secondary school, and this data provided valuable insights for this research project.

CHAPTER VII: DISCUSSION, RESEARCH IMPLICATIONS, AND CONCLUSIONS

Discussion

The research project was conceived as a means of uncovering information about the impact that CCR curriculum has had upon the lives of minoritized secondary school students in North Carolina. The perceptions that the study participants have, with regards to CCR curriculum delivery, provided crucial insights about the realities for minoritized students who often do not have a voice in the education process. These insights provide meaningful data for better understanding how CCR is being implemented in North Carolina's schools and how school policies might be modified to provide a full alignment with stated educational policy goals. Eleven study participants, from diverse backgrounds, informed this research project and influenced its findings, implications, and conclusions which serve to address a void in current educational scholarship. Their feedback, which was gathered in two rounds of personal interviews and a focus group meeting with three participants, provided a wealth of data which would lead to five key themes regarding CCR and minoritized students in North Carolina secondary schools. These themes will be discussed below in order to better understand their experiences with CCR curriculum and how it has impacted both their educational and career outcomes.

Educational Practices

The study participants were vocal about educational practices, which they believed were either detrimental or beneficial for their college preparation or career readiness, and these included rigorous curriculum, tracking practices, early college programs, a lack of remedial activities, and an absence of practical courses for adult living. Their experiences suggest that CCR curriculum requires intentionality and planning, on the part of school administrators, so that

obstacles that inhibit CCR are eliminated, while beneficial activities and practices are expanded. This would necessarily bring individual schools into closer compliance with the CCR curriculum objectives stated by education leaders at the state level, who have adopted standards which "build to College and Career Readiness" as students progress from kindergarten through twelfth grade (State Board of Education, 2017).

There was almost universal agreement among the study participants that rigorous courses helped them prepare for college-level academic expectations and this is consistent with the argument that intentional rigor prepares students "to be critical thinkers and lifelong learners" (Jackson, 2011). Honors, AP, and IB courses were credited with teaching students these skills which appear to translate into college preparatory success, and were a common characteristic for all the participants in the research project. All the participants successfully matriculated into a four-year university, and over half of the participants graduated with bachelor's degrees, suggesting that the opportunity to learn in a rigorous academic environment was a key factor in their college and career preparation while in secondary school. Researchers including Plucker and Callahan (2020), also argue that advanced courses, including honors and AP levels, prepare high school students for college studies, while Klopfenstein and Thomas (2009) suggest that the impact is primarily associated with AP courses in math and science. The widespread support for advanced courses, and arguably increased academic rigor, has been a key factor in the movement by many school districts to expand their AP and IB programs and promote broader enrollment (Hayes, 2007).

While a rigorous curriculum was widely cited as one of the factors which increased CCR, equal access continues to be problematic due to tracking practices which often exclude minoritized students from the higher tracks. This dynamic was observed by study respondents

who had either experienced adverse tracking practices or witnessed the impact upon the dynamics of their friends' academic careers. There is ample academic scholarship, which has explored this issue, including work by Kolluri (2021) and Jeffries and Silvernail (2017) that suggest a widespread pattern of barriers which prevent equal access to advanced courses in secondary education. Wai and Worrell (2020) focused their research on students with low socio-economic status but came to the same conclusions reached by other researchers because of the overlap between minoritized students and low-income households. Several school districts in North Carolina tried to address this challenge by setting aside funding to pay for students' AP exam fees, but these efforts have not enjoyed widespread success due to other factors including bias, peer pressure, and structural skills deficits (More Students Need Challenging Courses, 2004). Several study participants noted that they were among the only students of color in their advanced classes, and in several cases, they had to have someone advocate for them to be able to gain entry into their school's college bound track. This experience is typical of the observations made by Welton and Martinez (2014), Harris et al. (2020), George Mwangi et al. (2017), and Tyson (2011) who found that tracking practices played a primary role in diverting minoritized students away from a college preparatory curriculum. Until an advanced curriculum, with more rigorous coursework, becomes fully accessible to minoritized students in North Carolina, they will continue to be negatively impacted because they are only receiving a skewed version of CCR curriculum which does not provide adequate college preparation.

Another beneficial educational practice, which promoted college readiness was the availability of early college programs which included the Early College, Middle College and Dual Enrollment plans which exposed high school students to a college curriculum and environment. During the interviews, Jenna and Sam disclosed that they had attended early

247

college programs which had provided them with access to challenging college-level courses during their high school enrollment. In addition, several of the other participants, including Heather, Sarah, and David, had taken courses at their local community colleges through North Carolina's Career & College Promise program. Their experiences of completing an occupational career license, while still in high school, supported Hyslop's (2006) work which documented the academic and career benefits offered by dual enrollment programs. While Sam and Jenna expressed disappointment with aspects of their early college programs, it was clear that they both had gained valuable knowledge about college routines, as well as an element of assimilation into college culture (Hooker & Brand, 2010 and Conley, 2010). Sam expressed the extent of this newfound knowledge succinctly when he said that he did not want to apply to the college campus where Jefferson Early College was housed because he felt that he "had already seen most of what" the campus offered and he "wanted to go somewhere else and try other places instead." Jenna's experience was almost the opposite, since students at her early college program were prohibited from mixing with students on the college campus, so she only gained the experience of taking courses with the rigor expected at the collegiate level (Armstrong et al., 2021). It was clear, however, that most of the study participants who enrolled in early college exposure programs gained college-bound social capital and this translated into an internalization of college-bound culture which would be an asset when they matriculated into their four-year programs, and worked to complete their undergraduate degrees (Alvarado & An, 2015).

Strong elective course offerings were also mentioned as a significant boon to college and career readiness, especially when students were in high school and getting closer to graduation. Lowe (2010) cites the role of music courses on both the cognitive and emotional development of students, and Beth had expressed the role that her band classes had on her ability to understand

248

mathematics. Alegrado and Winsler (2020) reached a similar conclusion about the impacts of music education and elective courses on the success of secondary school students, but their study was focused on "predominantly low-income, ethnically diverse students" which was even more relevant to this research project. Their work documented a positive correlation between access to music education, and robust electives, and improved grade point averages as students progressed through school. Sumners (2021) found that access to science electives in high school was beneficial for CCR because students were able to explore curriculum in fields that they wanted to pursue in post-secondary studies. This was especially true for David who benefitted from the Health Sciences and Nursing Fundamentals courses that he took at Plover High School on the path to earning his CNA license. Not only would he end up pursuing a career in the healthcare industry, but these experiences influenced his decision to pursue a biomedical undergraduate degree and later a master's degree in Genetic Counseling.

Study participants also expressed a need for more "practical" courses which would help adolescents as they transition to adulthood and face the realities of budgeting, paying bills, and managing their own households and finances. Research by LeBlanc et al. (2022) was supportive of this insight since they discovered that elective cooking classes, which were offered in high school, not only improved students' cooking skills, but also improved their nutritional awareness which led to dietary improvements. Ironically, Ben had specifically mentioned the need for students to learn how to operate a stove so that they could later cook for themselves while in college. Research by Michael (2016) and Erner et al. (2016) suggests that the best strategy for improving the economic lives of young adults is to increase their financial awareness and literacy starting in high school and continuing through post-secondary education. His work is consistent with the opinions expressed by Ben and Heather who felt that increased exposure to financial

literacy courses in high school would have been beneficial since it would have impacted the decisions that they made in college with respect to taking out loans, choosing their colleges, and managing their household budgets. These skills are essential to college and career success, but are not taught as part of the college curriculum, so they either have to be learned in students' households or become part of secondary school training.

The final secondary school teaching deficit that was commonly referred to by the participants was the lack of true remedial education to address subject specific deficits that were identified as weaknesses. It is interesting to note that although all the study participants were successful in matriculating to college, and making progress towards graduation, many of them felt that career options were closed to them because of specific academic weaknesses which were never properly addressed while they were in secondary school. This painful self-awareness was expressed by David who was forced to change his major from chemistry to psychology during his freshman year of college because he was worried that he was going to flunk out due to low grades. Shaw (2014) and Lacy (2019) recognized this problem and argue that current remedial programs are flawed because they do not effectively link instruction to the real lives of students who are falling behind academically, and as a consequence are not being engaged by them. Research regarding the success of Winthrow University High School, conducted by Rourke and Boone (2009), supports the idea that remediation programs must be tailored to the needs of individual students, and they must address weaknesses immediately so that students are prepared for college preparatory classes as they continue through high school. Wilkins and Bost (2016) also recommend that mentoring, family engagement, an enrichment curriculum, and career focused classes be used, beginning in middle school, to bolster remediation efforts for students who are falling behind. These strategies are linked by the presence of a relevant curriculum,

which engages students while they are remediating their specific areas of academic weakness. Resolving these learning challenges early would be beneficial for all students, since they would no longer have to avoid particular academic subjects which might be needed to pursue their career and college dreams in the future.

Personal Initiative and Self-Advocacy

A common theme that was expressed during the research interviews was the role that self-advocacy played in successful navigation of the secondary school to college labyrinth. When teachers and guidance counselors did not provide assistance, study participants were forced to make important decisions on their own, and figure out how to get into the courses they needed in order to be better prepared for college. Researchers, including Khalifa (2013), Demerath et al. (2008), and Astramovich and Harris (2007) have documented the importance of providing minoritized students with the skills and training to be able to self-advocate for themselves during their secondary education, so that they are able to enjoy the same college and career experiences as their peers. Rockinson-Szapkiw et al. (2021) had similar findings, but their study was focused primarily on racial and ethnic minority women who were pursuing STEM careers and the role that mentors played in fostering the self-efficacy needed to be successful in college. Their work was particularly interesting when framed against the experiences of Jenna who attended the STEM program at City Heights Early College and was frustrated that her high level of self-advocacy may have provided a justification for adults in her schools to let her work things out on her own. Bowen et al. (2020) focused on the barriers to entry for marginalized students who wanted to pursue engineering degrees and the challenges they encountered when trying to successfully complete their programs because "the field of engineering was historically designed and continues to operate for the benefit of straight, cis, White, affluent men." While

251

mentoring programs would be beneficial, a common denominator which would lead to successful course placements both in middle school and college was a collection of personal traits which included persistence in the face of challenges, self-confidence, and a willingness to self-advocate when necessary.

Cultural Awareness and Diversity

There were several problematic practices that were discovered with regards to cultural awareness and diversity in North Carolina's secondary schools. The first and most important was the lack of equitable access to advanced courses which would impact CCR dramatically for minoritized students since they often felt that they did not have the same opportunities for college preparation as some of their Caucasian classmates. Stereotyping of minoritized students was also a problem because this impacted tracking practices in their schools, and created an environment of low expectations which would create barriers to the college pathways which they wanted to pursue. Stereotyping and low expectations also appeared to play a role in the high intensity recruiting by the military, which was experienced by several of the study participants who were frustrated by a pattern that they believed was either racially or ethnically motivated. Finally, several participants reported a widespread pattern of preferential treatment, by their secondary school teachers, which favored either Caucasian or Asian students at the expense of their marginalized counterparts.

Numerous researchers have documented the challenges that secondary schools face with providing equitable access to advanced courses in America's secondary schools and North Carolina appears to follow this same pattern of student placement. Shelby noted that while there was a larger number of African American and Latinx students taking honors classes at Burris High School, as opposed to AP courses, the majority were enrolled in the regular courses which

were not college preparatory. This pattern is consistent with the observations made by researchers Superville (2016) and Rodriguez and McGuire (2019) who observed similar patterns, which were especially evident when focusing on course placement patterns of African American males (Johnson & Larwin, 2020). These views were also echoed by Lisa, Beth, Sarah, and Jenna who all saw similar demographic patterns in the rosters of the AP classes at their high schools. According to their accounts, this pattern existed in middle school but became more prominent as they progressed through secondary schooling, and was usually the most inequitable with regards to AP courses. Hallett and Venegas (2011) argue that school districts have tried to address this inequity by offering more AP classes in low-income schools, but this approach is just a "smoke screen" being used to address concerns about equity since these schools also need the highly trained teachers who provide a genuine college preparatory curriculum in more affluent schools. Martinez and Welton (2014) documented similar patterns of discriminatory barriers preventing Latinx and African American students from taking advanced courses, and they also discovered that the focus on improving scores on high stakes accountability exams was also diverting teaching resources from college preparatory activities, which in turn resulted in fewer minoritized students making it into the college pipeline. In many cases it appears that school leaders are negligent about taking the necessary steps to increase enrollment in advanced courses because they are either content with the status quo, or do not have the cultural awareness necessary to educate and motivate diverse student populations about the benefits of a rigorous college preparatory curriculum while they are in secondary school.

Several of the study participants commented about the problems of stereotyping minoritized students at their secondary schools, which was detrimental to their access to resources and impacted how they were treated by school staff. Durand (2020) discovered that

minoritized students tended to believe that middle school educational practices were fair and meritocratic, but these positions were undermined by persistent narratives of racialized treatment which seemed to be the consequence of racial and ethnic stereotyping. Jahangir et al. (2021) found that stereotyping of minoritized students was a salient feature of secondary school disciplinary patterns, and this impacted their ability to learn and have equal access to educational resources. Jenna expressed this problem with being stereotyped when she discussed the over-policing of the "diverse groups" of students in the STEM early college. She had never been subjected to this kind of scrutiny before, and she attributed the crackdown on student behavior to the fact that "a lot of my fellow students were Black."

One of the most frustrating experiences that the study participants had to deal with, in regard to racial and ethnic stereotyping, involved high pressure recruitment efforts by the armed services. Recruiters from the armed services selectively targeted minoritized students for enlistment at a higher rate than many of their White counterparts and this is affirmed by Savage (2004) who noted that they intentionally target students of low socioeconomic status since they are more susceptible to their pitch about scholarship money for college. While his analysis of recruitment strategies suggested that schools with large populations of minoritized students are not intentionally targeted, he noted that "school districts that get screened out are those affluent enough that most of their students are probably college-bound" (Savage, 2004, p. 5). Lagotte (2016) was surprised at the database resources that military recruiters were able to utilize in building profiles for students who would become enlistment targets, and he cited the heavy reliance upon racial and ethnic stereotypes that were key strategies for gaining the trust of students and their parents. While Lisa and Heather did not know the details regarding the level of sophistication of the databases being utilized by recruiters at their schools, they expressed a

254

suspicion about the specificity of information which they had access to in terms of individual students. Their concerns were well founded because recruiters are not only targeting school districts and schools where they are more likely to enlist students, but they are able to identify individuals whose profiles suggest that they are prime targets for recruitment. Their databases used stereotypes to create data markers such as "down-in-the-city" to classify "urban, black, and Latino, low-income households with a high school degree as the highest educational attainment" (Lagotte, 2016, p. 38). Sarah explicitly articulated her concerns about military recruiters using racial and ethnic stereotypes to take advantage of students, and their families, because they were more likely to respond to their pitch about paying for college after enlistment. During the focus group meeting, the discussion participants were astounded to find out that NCLB legislation specifically provided the military with access to student records for the purpose of fostering enlistment.

Secondary School CCR Support Structures

Several factors were cited as CCR support structures during the interviews and these included adult advocates and programs specifically designed to foster college and career preparation. Parents and older siblings who attended college provided great information resources for students who were navigating the college admissions process, and both Sam and Sarah credited these family connections for their contributions. Seemingly more significant, however, was the support role played by caring adults who made connections with the study participants during secondary school, and provided them with valuable guidance. This is noteworthy because these adults served in a capacity which they may have needed because their parents and family could not help them, or their guidance counselor was not able to adequately fulfill the full range of their duties. Sam specifically cited the advocacy that the Plains Middle

255

School librarian played when she pushed him to apply to the early college program in his district. Shelby, Anna, and Beth had similar praise for some of their teachers who were instrumental in guiding them on a college bound pathway and this is consistent with the recommendations made by Zhang et al. (2018) and Bottoms (2022) who argue that teachers are among the stakeholders who should be taking an active role in the career and college preparation of secondary school students. Curry and Milsom (2014) also promote the role of teachers in CCR activity, with an emphasis on providing support and reinforcement for the work of the school's guidance counselors. Clearly, secondary school students will experience the most favorable CCR outcomes when they are fully supported by family, teachers, and support staff as they progress through their middle school and high school studies.

CCR programs such as HOSA, AVID, and High School Connections were credited with their practical role in preparing both college readiness but more importantly for helping students to make decisions about their career pathways. Robin et al. (2021) discovered the AVID program was successful at improving academic achievement in middle school students and this was primarily through increasing their executive function which translated into an increased capacity for taking on the challenge of advanced courses as they progressed through secondary school. Both the HOSA and High School Connections programs are focused on career exploration and readiness and both David and Sarah would complete their CNA licensure because of their participation in these programs. Lieffring (2016) credits the HOSA program, with which David was affiliated, for providing students with hands-on experience which introduces and exposes them to careers in the medical field, while the High School Connections program is unique in that it offers both a four-year college transfer option and a CTE pathway. Sarah used the four-year transfer pathway to complete her CNA license and accumulate college

256

transfer credits through dual enrollment at her local community college while she was still in high school. Her experience was unique because she not only gained certification in a career-oriented field, but she also improved her college readiness, and this exemplifies the effectiveness of true CCR opportunities.

The North Carolina Community College System (NCCCS) serves as a CCR support structure because the courses offered provide CTE training for students graduating from high school who want to pursue a technical career, as well as a stepping-stone for students who do not feel academically or financially prepared for enrollment in a four-year college. Both Anna and Jenna attended North Carolina community colleges, after graduating from high school, and several other study participants were frustrated that they had not explored this option prior to enrolling in their four-year program because they believed it would have helped them financially. Wyner (2014) supports their high opinion of community colleges for their degree completion rates, equity, student learning, and labor market outcomes, but research by Aulk et al. (2017) suggests that the success of community college transfers at four-year colleges is no better than that of incoming freshmen. Given the higher accessibility of the community college system for minoritized student populations, they do appear to act as a viable alternative for students who might not have attended college if they did not pursue this academic pathway first (Carrell & Kurlaender, 2016).

Social Factors Impacting Minoritized Secondary School Students

There has been a long-recognized intersectionality between low socio-economic status and racial or ethnic marginalization, in the United States, and this has impacted African American, Latinx, and Native American families disproportionately (Raz, 2013 and Nielsen, 2019). Unfortunately, low socioeconomic status often attaches a host of additional challenges to

families and their school age children including higher rates of trauma, incarceration, food insecurity, housing uncertainty, and residency in less desirable neighborhoods. These additional social challenges often impact minoritized secondary school students and impact their ability to regularly attend school, learn, and achieve college or career goals.

Nielsen (2019) reviewed income data from the year 2016 and found that African American children were 2.5 times more likely to live in poverty than their White counterparts and 6.4 times more likely to have a father who was incarcerated. Her research also discovered that 28 percent of Latinx children and 34 percent of African American youngsters were living in poverty. This research was supported by McGhie and Piper (2021) who also documented high levels of incarceration and dropout rates for parents of minoritized students which contributed to lower household incomes, and were a factor in their low socioeconomic status. Parents who had college degrees had a median family income of approximately $92,000 while their counterparts who had never attended college had a median family income of only $31,200 (Nielsen, 2019). An interesting pattern which was documented by Nielsen's research was the close alignment in poverty rates between Native American and African American families who had almost identical economic stratification data. Students from less educated families often lived with access to fewer economic resources, and had the additional disadvantage of having less social capital with regards to college preparation because they were often from households where neither parent had attended college.

One of the most pernicious effects of low socioeconomic status is the impact that it has upon housing security and housing options for families which in turn leads to a higher concentration of minoritized students who are "being disproportionately represented at urban schools and the schools at the very bottom of the quality distribution." (Arcidiacono & Koedel,

2013, p. 2). Lisa discussed the importance of attending a high performing school, in terms of

having access to college readiness and Anna remembers the efforts that her parents made to find

schools that she and her siblings could attend outside their school zone because of their concerns

about the quality of their assigned neighborhood schools. In addition, living in some of the less

desirable neighborhoods contributes to food insecurity for students and their families because

they are often functional food deserts which do not provide their residents with adequate access

to fresh fruits, proteins, and vegetables (Testa & Jackson, 2019). In addition to these challenges,

less desirable neighborhoods are often plagued by the twin evils of over-policing and high levels

of crime which are manifested in higher levels of trauma for minoritized secondary school

students (Way & Patten, 2013). Thus, the impact of CCR curriculum for minoritized secondary

school students is muted because of low socio-economic status which impacts access to higher

performing schools, sufficient nutrition, and the increased prevalence of childhood trauma which

has been directly linked to lower performance in school (Knox et al., 2023).

Research conducted by Inzlicht and Schmader (2012, p. 5) suggests that minoritized

students are often adversely impacted by stereotype threat which "can ultimately interfere with

intellectual functioning and academic engagement, setting the stage for later differences in

educational attainment, career choice, and job advancement." Stereotype threat is often

manifested when external factors, including dominant culture exhibits and mass media, convey

negative stereotypes that "lower performance and achievement, particularly affecting students of

color" (Cohn-Vargas, et al., 2021, p.7). Beth specifically raised this issue when she discussed

her frustration with the low expectations for students projected by the teachers and staff at

schools which were predominantly Black, and Shelby felt burdened by association with her rural

community's values which were not aligned with her ambition to finish college. The wide range

of negative external social factors, which impact North Carolina's minoritized secondary school students, provide additional challenges which must be addressed so that the state's goals of CCR for all students might be achieved.

Theoretical Implications

Critical Race Theory (CRT) provides the theoretical framework for this study by creating a lens through which the following question is asked: How do education laws, policies, and other societal structures impact CCR curriculum and how does this effect the lives of North Carolina's minoritized secondary school students? A CRT lens suggests that race is a social construct and that education practices are crafted and carried out with the intention of maintaining and reproducing White supremacy and privilege over time (Bradbury, 2014). The use of the CRT framework provides the study with a conceptual foundation for elevating the lived experienced of minoritized students, while challenging the majoritarian narratives which claim that all students have equal opportunities in public school without regard for race, ethnicity, or other markers that signify diversity (Yosso, 2006).   Education law, school policies, and other institutional practices will be discussed using the CRT framework, and the narratives of the study participants, to better understand the mechanisms by which students of privilege are prioritized at the expense of minoritized groups in secondary schooling.

Legislation and Administrative Policy

The push for CCR curriculum in North Carolina began with the adoption of the No Child Left Behind legislation in 2002, followed by adoption of the Common Core Standards, and CCR language, in 2010 (Paulson, 2010). Critics of CCR argue that the students who benefit the most from the curriculum are students who are on a college bound track and statistically "Latino, African, and Native American students have lower college admission test scores than European

and Asian Americans; they are under-represented in college enrollments and degree completion, take longer to complete degrees, and have lower grade-point averages." (Gay, 2014, p. 68). Both Shelby and Sarah came from high schools where few students went on to college, and their observations of matriculation patterns highlight the challenges for minoritized students because they did not feel as though they were expected to attend a four-year college. Zamudio et al. (2010, p. 40) argue that "NCLB negatively impacts all students" but particularly hurts minoritized students because "privileging and accepting only one way of knowing, it devalues the funds of knowledge that students of color bring with them to their educational experience." This devaluation was especially evident when Heather discussed "feeling invisible and also kind of second guessing myself when it came to some of my classes that were predominantly White in high school." While she had earned her way into the college preparatory curriculum, the racialized environment was not receptive of her voice, which might have brought unique perspectives to the table, which did not conform to the dominant culture. Conley (2010) and Royster et al. (2015) suggest that CCR curriculum is producing the intended results since privileged students in the dominant culture are being provided with the tools necessary to prepare for college, while the rest of the student body is receiving training for the blue-collar work force.

Cole (2017) argues that neoliberal policy makers in the United States intensified this divergence between the affluent and the marginalized working class when they pushed for an agenda of "New Imperialism" and global markets, which would not only reduce trade barriers around the world but also gut the job markets in urban centers across the country. This intentional movement away from a manufacturing economy had racially observable ramifications because it "creates jobs in the knowledge economy, for which minorities have little training; the sweatshops and other exploitative conditions it creates afflict poor people of color"

(Cole, 2017, p. 157). Ironically, the practice of sorting individuals out for work occupations, on the basis of their racial/ethnic traits, has a long history and was one of the social practices proposed by Lewis Terman whose work formed the basis for academically gifted programs that are considered a mainstay of CCR programs in secondary schools today (Ladson-Billings et al., 2021). Terman's work would also impact the creation and use of aptitude tests, including the Army Alpha exam which was used for sorting recruits into military ranks during World War I, but would also be used as a data set which promoted the intellectual inferiority of African American males (Galloway, 1994). This was a gold mine for White supremacists who would use this data to argue that African Americans were genetically inferior, and better suited to unskilled labor, despite modern researchers' findings that "leave little doubt that the institutionalized racism that pervaded the educational system in this country at the turn of the century was, to a large extent, responsible for the Black-White score differential on the 1917 Army Alpha" (Galloway, 1994, p. 9).

During the focus group discussion, Lisa expressed her concerns about military recruitment as a form of racial oppression which relegates minoritized students to low socioeconomic occupations. Her insights are closely aligned with Galloway's research because unequal educational opportunities during K-12 schooling lead not only to lower test scores on exams like the SAT, ACT, but also other aptitude tests which can then be used to justify the maintenance of generational poverty for groups of people who are marginalized on the basis of their race and/or ethnicity. Sarah also felt that she was targeted for recruitment because of her demographics and she discussed how the recruiters were able to convince many of her less affluent classmates to enlist instead of pursuing a collegiate pathway. These experiences, as viewed through a critical race theory lens, suggest that NCLB legislation has been successful in

maintaining the inequitable status quo because it provides CCR resources to ensure that privileged students are prepared for college, while legally providing access to student records so that recruiters can be more deliberate and successful in their recruitment of minoritized high school students.

The relationship between the military and marginalized populations is more complex, however, since there are many minoritized students who utilize enlistment in the military as an alternative pathway to both college matriculation and meaningful careers. Lieber (2013) cites the story of a young man who enlisted in the military to pay for college because he was tired of working multiple shifts daily, while enrolled in college, in order to pay for his tuition. Research conducted by Loughran (2011) suggests that young recruits initially enjoy significantly higher incomes than their non-military counterparts, but this advantage quickly flattens out when college graduates begin their careers. Another important finding was that enlistment in the military increased the likelihood that an individual would complete an associates degree, but decreased the chances that they would complete a four-year college program. While all branches of the military offer some type of tuition assistance program, one of the frustrations for enlistees is that the pathway to becoming a commissioned officer is difficult for someone who begins their military career as an enlisted private (Thirtle, 2001). The Army, Navy, and Air Force generally use the service academies, or college ROTC programs to develop their corps of commissioned officers, while the Marines utililize Officer Candidate School (OCS) for the same purpose (Thirtle, 2011). Unfortunately, young people who enlist in the military, instead of going to college, cannot take advantage of these primary officer training conduits and instead are forced to compete with each other for a limited number of officer-training slots which are set aside for non-commissioned recruits. Further compounding this frustrating dynamic, was the discovery

263

by McAllen, et al. (2013) that military enlistment did not positively impact the graduation rates of enlistees who matriculated in college programs after they completed their service.

Research conducted by Buddin and Kapur (2001) suggests that military recruitment is only improved by tuition assistance programs in the short run, since enlistees who take college courses while serving are less likely to remain in the military after their enlistment term is completed. Furthermore, Kleykamp (2006) asserts that enlistment decisions are fueled more by socioeconomic status, personal college aspirations, and the magnitude of the military presence in a local community, rather than specific service benefits such as tuition assistance. Dexter (2020) discovered that soldiers had a challenging time adapting to civilian employment, after they returned from military service, and this potentially offset gains in skills and training which were made while they were enlisted in a service branch. This cumulative research suggests that the decision to enlist in the military, as a pathway to economic self-sufficiency, is extremely personalized, and is influenced by both internal and external factors including family military service, financial resources accessible for college enrollment, and community culture.

Anna, Jenna, and Heather promoted community colleges as ideal transitional learning spaces, prior to transferring to a four-year college, but they were not aware that these campuses are not fully accessible to immigrants in North Carolina. In 2004, the North Carolina State Board of Community Colleges in North Carolina issued a memo which provided its member campuses the latitude to enact an enrolment ban against undocumented students from admissions, in a move which was widely viewed as being racially targeted against the Latinx immigrant population and was supported by both the Democratic and Republican gubernatorial candidates who campaigned on the promise of a permanent legislative ban (Pluviose, 2008). This policy was a perverse act of overt racism directed against the state's immigrant Latinx

264

students, under the guise of alignment with immigration policy, because it violated the North Carolina Administrative Code which mandates that all North Carolina colleges maintain an open-door policy for all students who are either high school graduates or at the age of eighteen (Flores & Oseguera, 2009). Contradictory memos would be sent out in 2007 and 2008, and in a few short years the North Carolina Community College System (NCCCS) would be marketing itself aggressively to students of color, and especially Latinx students, since their opportunities for admission to the University of North Carolina system are restricted by both admissions and financial aid policies (Ozuna & Saenz, 2012). Social justice advocates would organize to petition the North Carolina General Assembly to provide relief for undocumented students by allowing them to pay in-state tuition in both the university and community college systems so that they would not be economically screened out of attendance in a clear act of racism which was cloaked in a seemingly race-neutral administrative policy (Latinos Fight for What is Right, 2005). North Carolina was an outlier in terms of their approach to providing immigrants with access to the college systems, because they left the decisions to either the local community colleges or the North Carolina University Board of Governors when most states decided the issue either by an act of the legislature or a citizen's initiative (Flores & Oseguera, 2009). This raises the possibility that future legislation in North Carolina, or actions by leaders at the University of North Carolina and NCCCS, could once again restrict access to the state's post-secondary education campuses in a fashion that diminishes opportunities for immigrant students.

School Practices

School policies are often tainted by discriminatory practices which present obstacles for minoritized secondary school students who are trying to complete their education as a pathway to social advancement. Critical Race Theory provides a framework for identifying these practices

265

and the role that they play in maintaining social and economic inequality which disproportionately impacts minoritized populations in North Carolina. Four practices which will be discussed, using the CRT framework, are academic tracking, district school zones, school guidance counselors, and community college diversion.

Minoritized students are often subjected to discriminatory biases when they are tracked into less rigorous course placements which are not college preparatory and this impacts their ability to present a competitive application during the college admissions process, while also denying them the necessary skills needed to complete an undergraduate college program (Carter, 2008; Diamond, 2006). Anna became acquainted with the disadvantages of being tracked into a lower-rigor course pathway when she transferred to Tennetville High School from the private Christian school she attended during her freshman and sophomore years, and she was not placed in the AP track because the private school did not offer honors courses. The vast majority of the participants in the research study were fortunate that they were able to access the most rigorous levels of curriculum, especially when they were in high school, but several of them have memories of the lower level courses. Shelby recalls the discomfort that she felt when there were conversations in her AP classes "about social issues and there was not one Black person in the class, but they would be talking about how things affect Black people." Interestingly, Shelby captured two of the systemically oppressive practices that researchers have documented; the absence of students of color in AP classrooms, and the presumption on the part of the dominant culture that they understand or can relate to the experiences of the people who are experiencing oppression (Welton & Martinez, 2014; Allen & Metcalf, 2019).

Educational systemic racial oppression is boldly carried out in plain view when school districts establish school zone boundaries which increase segregation in their districts, or force

266

students to attend sub-standard schools because of the neighborhood that they live in (Trounstine, 2018; Wilson, 2021). Critical race scholars argue that these de facto housing resegregation practices are contributing to more inequality in schools and this is a recurring problem in terms of college and career preparation for minoritized students who have the misfortune of living in less desirable neighborhoods where assigned schools do not provide meaningful CCR instruction (Zeimer, 2020). Anna was keenly aware of this challenge because her parents were diligent about getting her into schools that were outside the zone in which they lived, because they believed that their neighborhood schools were not up to the task of preparing their children for college. Sarah and Heather were also concerned about district zoning issues and during the interviews they discussed the issues of rezoning which would not only be disruptive for many families but would potentially impact funding for particular schools. These insights support the findings of numerous CRT theorists who decry the impact that zoning policies and school district boundaries have on minoritized families who cannot easily move out of their neighborhoods to take advantage of better schools elsewhere.

Jain et al. (2020) documented the practice of diverting students of color towards community colleges, as an alternative to four-year college matriculation, and this has led to an expansion of community colleges and their role in post-secondary education. Lisa witnessed this firsthand at Lincoln High School when some of her African American friends were pushed to attend community colleges by the school counselors who did not seem to support their goal of attending a four-year college. These counselors often justified their behavior by suggesting that the community colleges would be more affordable for their families, making the presumption that because they were African American, they would be less likely to have the economic resources necessary for attending a four-year institution. Chapman et al. (2020) also stressed the

267

importance of the role that school counselors play in the college decision-making process for African American students, and their study noted that students who saw a guidance counselor in high school were more likely to apply for college, and these students were more likely to see a counselor if they had a positive rapport with them.

One of the racialized challenges to this dynamic is the implicit bias that many school counselors manifest because they do not believe that African American students are college bound and they do not believe their time will be well spent assisting them in the admissions process (Freeman, 2004; Rose et al., 2013). When students do not feel that the counselors believe that they are capable, and likely to succeed in college, they are less likely to spend time visiting them for assistance with the college admissions process (Washington, 2010). Zasloff and Steckel (2014) countered this narrative using a "college counselor," for high school seniors, whose role is to provide advocacy and support for students who are in the process of applying for college. Steckel also worked with students who were not expected to attend college and he learned to meet them on their terms as he took the time to get to know them during the application process. Heather's experience with her counselor supports the conclusions of the researchers about the low expectations that counselors sometimes express regarding students of color and the importance of relationships. Sarah was swayed by the military recruiters because they provided her with more information than her guidance counselor, and she felt that they were more interested in providing her with a pathway to college. This was surprising since Sarah completed her CNA licensure while in high school, indicating her ability to finish a college-level academic program, but her counselor still did not seem to provide much assistance with her college admissions process. The experiences of Sarah, Lisa, and Heather illustrate the role that race and ethnicity play in the college matriculation process, and support academic literature

which argues that minoritized students face barriers because of the patterns of discrimination that are present in educational institutions.

The experiences of the study participants confirm CRT research conducted by education scholars who seek to expose inequalities and address the racialized practices which impact the schooling and educational opportunities of minoritized students in North Carolina and across the the United States. North Carolina still discriminates against immigrant students by limiting their access to both the university and community college systems, and many school districts continue to use zoning practices which increase segregation and concentrate poverty within their boundaries. These patterns of discrimination are problematic and are contributing factors which perpetuate the oppression of racially marginalized students who are unable to use public education as a ladder to improve the quality of their lives. CCR curriculum is supposed to provide a pathway to either a college education or a meaningful career, and evidence provided by the study participants and researchers, suggest that this is not happening with fidelity.

Implications for Education Policy

While this study has uncovered many areas of concern for improving CCR curriculum, as it is experienced by minoritized students in North Carolina, the study participants' narratives suggest implementation of specific policy initiatives to improve education outcomes and prepare all secondary school students for improved lives as adults. In order to properly address this broad reform agenda, legislation would need to be enacted at all levels of government and school districts would need to adopt new practices which are aligned with policy changes that would need to take place within individual schools. These efforts would need to expand beyond the narrow domain of CCR curriculum in secondary schools and extend throughout K-12 public education in North Carolina, in order to bring about the necessary seismic shift in education

policy. If this reform agenda is successful in creating equal CCR opportunities, for all students in North Carolina, it could become a model for marginalized populations across the United States and serve as a beacon of hope for improving their lives using education as a tool for advancement.

Equitable Access to College

The North Carolina General Assembly should be lobbied, by advocates of marginalized student populations, to pass legislation which would provide equal access to the state's university and community college systems for all students, without regard to their immigration status or demographic identity. Equal access would mean the removal of all barriers to enrollment and attendance including the current practice of charging out-of-state tuition to undocumented students or denying financial aid to the children of immigrant parents. This would mean an expansion of the stated missions of both the community college and the university systems, so that they would be explicitly inclusive of all residents of the state without regard for race, ethnicity, immigration status, or any other demographic markers. Furthermore, the state should create a scholarship fund to provide resources for students who do not qualify for federal financial aid because of their immigration status. These legislative changes would not only remediate the institutional barriers placed in the CCR pathways of immigrants, but they would also provide additional labor resources which would benefit North Carolina since all students would have robust opportunities for college and career advancement.

Dismantling District Attendance Zones

North Carolina state legislators should also pass new laws, in consultation with the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction, which dismantle residence-based school attendance zones in all local education agencies (LEAs) or districts. Removing attendance zone boundaries

270

would initially be disruptive, since students would have the opportunity to attend any school in the district, but the costs would be worthwhile because of the potential for increasing equitable access to a quality education. Many of North Carolina's school districts advertise "School Choice" programs, but this is a misnomer because the first eligibility criteria for attending a particular school is domicile within the zone. While many districts offer excess seats to students outside a school's residential zone, students must either qualify per an admissions process or win a lottery in order to enroll. Many less affluent students cannot attend their schools of choice, even if they qualify, because they do not have access to transportation to reach schools outside their residential zone. As a consequence, several additional policy initiatives would have to be implemented simultaneously to facilitate the movement away from zone-based attendance, and these include an expansion of bus routes (which would mean dramatically increasing bus driver compensation to draw in sufficient staffing), and placement of innovative magnet programs in schools that are currently deemed undesirable. Schools which have more enrollment requests, than available seats (those openings which remain after current students and siblings are accounted for), would use lotteries to assign students in a bias-neutral fashion and students who do not make it into their first-choice school would have a weighted preference for the lottery for their second-choice school to improve their chances of selection. The weighted preferences would increase, as students moved to third and fourth choices so that they are not likely to be forced into a choice that is near the bottom of their list. While younger siblings would be allowed to join their older siblings at their schools, without the use of a lottery, they would not be required to follow their enrollment and would be able to pursue their interests on other school campuses if their enrollment requests are successful. The expansion of magnet programs, at previously neglected schools, will promote district-wide balancing of student enrollments, which

271

should reduce the necessity of resorting to the lottery system for most of the students in the district. The expansion of magnets will be created with the intention of providing a diverse palette of CCR curriculum offerings, as well as incentivizing the equal distribution of resources (funding, staff, etc.) and balancing enrollment across the district's schools.

Finally, a new approach to bus transportation would need to be developed to provide school transportation, so that students are able to attend the school-of-choice in which they are enrolled, without the need for personal transportation. Without access to transportation, school-choice schemes favor affluent families. According to School Choice in North Carolina (2024):

> North Carolina offers K-12 students and their families several types of school choice including three private school choice programs, charter schools, magnet schools and home schooling. North Carolina does not have any type of open enrollment that would allow students to attend schools outside their zoned schools. (para. 1)

While this statement is largely true, it is unclear because it does not define what a "zone" is, and this is especially confusing since the statement is referring to school district boundaries as zones. Generally speaking, zones are geographic attendance regions, within a school district, so this statement implies school choice enrollment restrictions within school districts, which is false. Most of North Carolina's school districts offer school choice programs, but their accessibility is limited by unequal transportation access across the state. A review of North Carolina school districts found that only the state's largest four districts (which include Wake County Schools, Charlotte-Mecklenburg, Guilford County Schools, and Winston-Salem/Forsyth County Schools) offer bus transportation as part of their school choice programming. Wake County and Winston-Salem/Forsyth County Schools offer hub-based transportation models where students can be dropped off at designated school stops to ride buses to their choice schools (2023-2024 Magnet

Stop Hubs, 2022). The Charlotte-Mecklenburg school district uses a combination of

transportation zones and feeder patterns to provide transportation to school choice programs but

students who do not meet the dual criteria do not receive transportation (FAQs, n.d.):

> Transportation is provided if you obtain a seat within your transportation zone
>
> AND the school you selected serves your feeder pattern. These stops are routed based on
>
> your home address. If you apply to a school outside of your transportation zone OR
>
> outside of your feeder pattern, you will need to provide transportation for your child.
>
> (para. 12)

Guilford County Schools had the most flexible transportation scheme, for school choice

transportation, which included five different options for parents and students (Transportation

Department: Modes of Transportation, 2022). After the four largest school districts, which serve

between 160,000 to as few as 53,000 students, the next largest school districts have student

populations of approximately 40,000-50,000 students, and none of them provide school choice

transportation for students outside of their geographic attendance zones. This pattern continues

across the state, and while there may be exceptions, none were evident from perusing school

district websites. In order to provide equitable access to high-quality schools, across the state,

the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction should require schools to provide

transportation following the models of the Wake County, Guilford County, and Winston-

Salem/Forsyth County school districts. The state should also provide funding to assist the

smaller counties with the additional transportation burden, since many smaller counties do not a

large enough tax base to provide the necessary financial resources. This new busing scheme

would be costly, but is a necessary expense which is requisite for providing equitable school

choice within each North Carolina LEA.

Elimination of Rigid Curriculum Tracks

The next educational practice which must be revamped to provide equitable access to a quality curriculum is student tracking which is controversial because it is fully entrenched in local school policies and often favors privileged students who are segregated in high performing bubbles that operate as schools-within-schools in North Carolina. Theoharis (2009, p. 29) credits the school leaders who "intentionally dismantled school structures that marginalized, segregated, and impeded achievement" through de-tracking their school classrooms in an effort to create a learning environment which was inclusive, and provided opportunities for teams of teachers to both plan and teach collaboratively for the benefit of their schools' students. The seven school principals, whom Theoharis studied, were highly effective at bringing about genuine school improvement, but they all faced considerable resistance as they implemented their reforms, and this took a toll on them both emotionally and physically (Theoharis, 2008). His insights about the challenges of implementing changes in school practices, especially with regards to tracking, suggest that providing all students with access to a rigorous curriculum is difficult because of the diverse stakeholders who want to maintain the status quo. However, schools are required to maintain performance standards, according to the state's accountability model, so any reforms which help the school to meet its AYP goals should be embraced by school leaders at all levels across the state.

Generally, North Carolina secondary schools offer two tracks in middle school and three tracks in high school for students who do not have special educational needs. In most middle schools the two tracks are the standard curriculum, and the AG or AIG curriculum, which offers a more rigorous education experience which is not generally available to all students. Most high schools offer three academic tracks for students taking the standard curriculum, and the top track

is generally taken by students who plan to attend a four-year college after graduation. School

policies should be modified to provide more flexibility in course enrollment, in both middle

schools and high schools, so that students can move freely between tracks for their individual

courses. An approach to course scheduling which promotes student choice would be aligned

with North Carolina's Personal Education Plan (PEP) model which is often used to address the

needs of at-risk students. However, the personalization would be focused on course choice

rather than tiered supports. Thus, a motivated student who excels in social studies and English

literature might take AP courses in these subjects but take more accessible math classes, in one

of the lower tracks, if they desired. Likewise, a student who does not plan to go to college, but

has a passion for the Spanish language, might take an AP Spanish class while the rest of their

schedule is geared towards a vocational curriculum. This buffet approach to course selection

would be challenging to implement, because of the limited access to quality counseling, and

would meet considerable resistance from many teachers and administrators. However, it offers

the best curriculum options for all students since it would be catered to their individual strengths

and preferences. In order to ensure its success, students would be able to drop into a lower

course after two weeks, without penalty, if they do not feel the higher-level course selection is a

good match. This exit valve approach might initially mean some scheduling headaches, but it

would encourage students to strive for a higher curriculum without being penalized by being

stuck if the course is not a good match for them.

Finally, AG and AIG programs should be dropped from middle schools and replaced with

core and elective courses which are taught with at least two different levels of rigor. Middle

schools should then adopt the buffet style of course selection, as proposed for high schools, so

that all students can study in classes that match their individual strengths and take as few or as

275

many advanced courses as they feel are appropriate. Under current tracking systems, advanced students generally mingle with lower track students in elective courses only, and in some schools even the electives are tracked so that mingling between college-bound and vocational pathway students almost never occurs except in physical education classes or during lunch. These proposals are radical, when suggested for a traditional secondary school, but they offer students true curriculum choices and allow all students to mingle in classrooms that are more closely aligned with their academic comfort zones. Eliminating rigid tracking practices will also improve CCR outcomes because all students will have the opportunity to take classes which best expose them to the career pathways that interest them while in secondary school. This would seem revolutionary, because it would mean an abandonment of the archaic "sorting" practices that have become imbedded in education since they were first used by the United States military during World War I. It should be noted that a flexible approach to student educational and career capacity is also consistent with the current trends of dynamic employment patterns, for the American labor force, where few employees work in a single career for their working lives. Allowing secondary school students to exercise choice, in their curriculum, better mirrors the opportunities and flux that they will experience during their work lives as adults, and consequently provides them with the tools necessary to respond to a rapidly changing global economy.

Improving Counseling Resources in Secondary Schools

Another area for improvement in North Carolina secondary schools is the availability of high-quality counseling resources. Many schools do not have enough highly qualified school counselors to serve the complex needs of their diverse student populations which rely on them for resources that they cannot access anywhere else. There should be a mandatory staffing ratio

of no less than one counselor for every 150 students since this would provide the counseling staff with the opportunity to specialize in services so that all of their functions are adequately fulfilled and pressing student needs are addressed in a timely fashion.   All school counselors need to be trained so that they can provide the appropriate assistance to students who have suffered from emotional trauma, since this is a common attribute of students whose lives are characterized by the intersectionality of poverty, distressed neighborhoods, and systemic racism. In addition to strengthening the mental health responsiveness of secondary school counselors, additional training, that specifically focuses on college advising, should be mandatory for licensure as a secondary school counselor because of the important role that counselors play in the college admissions process. Curry and Milsom (2017) promote specialized training for school counselors which not only differentiates roles and focus, depending on the grade level, but is specifically tailored to promote a college-bound culture while meeting the unique needs of populations which are diverse. In addition, they argue that college and career readiness training is an essential element of the supplemental curriculum that counselors should use with students in various grades, while focusing on the transitional years when students move from elementary to middle school, middle school to high school, and finally high school to college or career.

Counselors will meet with each student on their caseload to review their academic performance and assist with their career planning and course selection. Students should be given a voice in selecting their assigned counselor, rather than counselors being assigned on the basis of students' grade levels, or by the alphabetic division of last names, so that they have an advocate with whom they have a genuine rapport. Counselor assignment could be made on an annual basis with input from students using a ranked choice ballot to provide students with agency so that they have the opportunity to participate in the decision, which could be revisited

every year to ensure a good fit. This would help to resolve the issue of students ignoring their

counselor's resources, because they do not feel they have their best interests in mind, and

counselors who are not able to build a meaningful caseload of students would have their

responsibilities realigned if possible, or they would be released from contract for an inability to

discharge their duties with fidelity. This might appear to be a stern approach that is not

sympathetic to the needs of individual school counselors, but students should be the highest

priority in schools, not the needs or conveniences of adults. Increasing the counseling staff in

secondary schools, while increasing expectations for their ability to successfully assist students,

will aid CCR efforts since students will have access to caring adults who provide the appropriate

college and career planning assistance that will help them make the best decisions possible for

their career pathways.

Strengthening CCR Pathways

The role of community colleges in CCR cannot be ignored and several of the study

participants used this pathway to achieve their goals of attending a four-year university. In

addition, community colleges provide access to vocational training which allows students to

pursue careers in the skilled trades including culinary arts, construction, plumbing, electrical

work, healthcare, and many other occupations. Secondary schools should emphasize that CCR is

really about career preparation, first and foremost, because the college readiness pathway is still

career oriented, but entails a longer academic journey. Instead of dedicating most resources to

college readiness, secondary schools should focus on the goal of career readiness so that all

students can pursue a meaningful career which provides them with an adequate standard of

living. This would mean an expansion of CTE programs, especially in high schools, so that

more students can gain certification in a career field while still in high school. An important

strategy for accomplishing this goal would involve building more partnerships with local community colleges and businesses, to create programs like High School Connections that provide students with an occupation upon graduation from high school. Military service should be given equal attention as a potential career option, but this should be done by school staff, instead of military recruiters who target vulnerable youth for enlistment and do not provide balanced information about the downsides of enlistment. Legislation would need to be passed to take away military access to student records and replace this provision with the military career literature which would be accessible to students through school staff. Military recruiters would only be able to speak with students about enlistment after they have graduated from high school, since this would minimize diversion from college enrollment since most college decisions will have already been finalized at that point.

Culturally Responsive Teaching

For schools to successfully implement effective CCR curriculum, which provides equitable career and college outcomes, teachers and staff must internalize culturally responsive teaching practices so that all of their students are included in their instruction. This does not simply mean exposing teachers and staff to culturally responsive teaching at a workshop, but rather changing the culture of secondary schools so that all educational practices, including instruction and student codes of conduct, are inclusive of diverse student populations. These changes would help reduce the stereotype threat which often causes schools to become hostile spaces for marginalized students, and adversely impacts their opportunity to learn effectively and gain the same benefits from education as their dominant culture counterparts. In the culturally responsive educational environment, there would be high expectations for all students without regard for demographics, race, ethnicity, or other types of diversity. Teachers would be

evaluated by their administrators for their culturally responsive teaching practices, during their

observations, so they would receive feedback about the equity of their instruction.

Administrators would coach teachers who were deficient in this domain, and a culture of cultural

responsiveness would be maintained because of the expectation that all teachers would embrace

these equitable practices as a requirement for continued employment. This would be

challenging, however, in the current educational environment, because of the shortage of skilled

teachers which has created challenges for holding teachers accountable. As a consequence, this

cultural shift should be a long-range goal which is achieved through strategic hiring practices and

skillful human resource management.

Study Limitations and Recommendations for Future Research

This research study gathered considerable data about the CCR curriculum experiences of

minoritized students who attended North Carolina secondary schools and should contribute to the

academic body of knowledge because of the narrow focus of the research questions that it

attempted to clarify. Despite the value of this research, there were several limitations which

minimize the general applicability of the study with regards to minoritized students in North

Carolina, or the United States as a whole. These limitations include the narrow sample size, the

relative homogeneity of the study participants, the absence of important marginalized subgroups,

and the lack of information about career outcomes.

While the research sample size was not terribly small, the eleven participants in the first-

round interviews were not fully representative of the demographic spectrum of minoritized

students who studied in North Carolina secondary schools during grades six through twelve.

Only six of the initial eleven participants provided second-round interviews, and of this group

only three participated in the focus group meeting. This attrition was not unexpected, however,

because of the long delay in getting IRB approval for the second-round and focus group

questions. What was more problematic, however, was the fact that all the study participants had

successfully matriculated to the same university, and this caused an expectable level of

homogeneity in the research data. Furthermore, African American women represented the mode

for the study participants since they comprised six of the eleven (55%) initial interviews. This

issue compounded itself as the study progressed since African American women represented five

of six (83%) voices in the second-round interviews, and one hundred percent (3 of 3) of the focus

group data. This dynamic was not unexpected, however, since a pilot study which had been

conducted earlier had the same sampling bias and the research proposal noted this pattern and the

challenges that it might represent for data collection. It should be noted that the sincere voices of

successful African American women in this study were greatly appreciated because of the

valuable insights that they were able to share, and their over-representation in the research data

(70% of interviews) is not a criticism, but rather a recognition that other voices were missing.

Interestingly, there were no male voices after the first-round interviews, where they represented

four of eleven (36%) meetings, and their absence during second-round interviews, and focus

group meetings, reduced their total contribution to the data set to only twenty-five percent.

There were two racial/ethnic demographics missing from the research project which were

troubling because of the potential for missing important information about the experiences that

they had with CCR curriculum. There were no study participants who identified as either Native

American or Asian, and this has unquestionably limited the wider applicability of the study's

findings. Both demographic subgroups are important because historically Native Americans

tend to trend with African Americans in terms of marginalization and other social welfare

outcomes, and the experiences of Asians are nuanced because this subgroup is often further

subdivided, because Southeastern Asians are often faced with marginalization while others are treated with a level of privilege that is often described as near-White. For these reasons, the project would have benefitted from having data that provided a voice for the unique experiences of both Asian-identifying students and Native Americans.

The final study limitation, which needs to be discussed, is the lack of data regarding career outcomes since college and career readiness was the focus of the research project. While three of the eleven study participants had earned their CNA licenses, only two of them had used their license to work in the field and they were only doing this to earn money while they completed their current academic studies. Sarah was the only study participant who was working in their desired occupation, so there was almost no data which could link CCR experiences with career outcomes. Since the study participants were primarily under the age of twenty-four, the vast majority had not settled into their occupation of choice, and most were still completing their educations in order to pursue their desired career pathway. This data omission is not surprising given the fact that the study sample was wholly comprised of students who responded to the recruitment flyer which was sent using a listserv of students who self-identified as non-White in the City University database. If snowball sampling had been successful, more occupational data could have been collected to improve the career findings of the study.

There are several recommendations for future research because of the limitations of this study about the perceptions that minoritized secondary school students have, regarding CCR curriculum in North Carolina, and how it impacts the quality of their lives. While this research project provided many useful insights about the impact of CCR curriculum upon the academic lives of the study participants, it was not successful at capturing their realized career outcomes. This is an important area of research because the effectiveness of CCR curriculum must

ultimately be evaluated in terms of the final occupational placements of students who did not

attend institutions of higher education as well as those who did. Furthermore, a comprehensive

study would also evaluate college enrollment outcomes as well as the perceived quality of life

reported by study participants.

Future research studies which seek to investigate the impact of CCR curriculum on the

lives of minoritized students in North Carolina should use an expanded research sample which

includes the narratives of more diverse voices. These narratives would not be limited to just

African American, Middle Eastern, and Latinx participants, but would also include the

perceptions and lived experiences of Native Americans and individuals who classify themselves

as Asian or Asian American. Sampling must also include the voices of students who never

attended college, as well as those who attended trade schools, community colleges, and four-year

college programs. An expanded data set, which includes all these narratives would be more

valuable than that which the current study provided, and would contribute to the discourse about

CCR curriculum and the impact that it has upon the lives of minoritized students. This is

important because it would increase the generalizability of the research findings so that they

might be used to better understand student experiences across the United States.

Additional studies, which investigate CCR curriculum in North Carolina should also be

longitudinal so that career placements and long-term occupational outcomes can be better

understood. This might mean conducting follow-up interviews with the current research study

participants in two-year, five-year, and ten-year increments to see what their occupations are and

how they have changed over time. Study participants should also be asked questions about their

quality of life and how their current occupations have affected their lives. Finally, in order to

increase the reliability of the study, additional data should be collected from the schools attended

by the study's participants. This data would be internal instead of topical and would require access to the insides of the buildings as well as classrooms, and students, so that educational practices could be observed. This would be challenging since schools are understandably reluctant to provide access to their students and campuses because of both safety and privacy concerns. Adopting these recommendations, future CCR curriculum studies can build upon this research and provide the academic community with a more comprehensive understanding of how minoritized students' lives are impacted by this curriculum framework.

Conclusions

The genesis of this research study can be found almost two decades ago when I taught an immigrant student in high school. Jesse had only been in the United States for two years, but she was the highest performing student in her class, and she was one of the most engaged learners I have ever worked with. Unfortunately, Jesse's top-of-the-class academic performance was almost meaningless because she could not attend college in North Carolina because of her immigration status. This was frustrating to me, as an educator, because she was so talented and without racialized barriers, which were being cloaked as following the law, she would have been able to pursue any profession that she chose. When she graduated from high school her plan was to work as an interpreter, since her command of the English language was flawless and her reading and writing skills in both Spanish and English were excellent. I was even more irritated by the propaganda in the school system, which was used to encourage all of our students to work hard so that they could attend college and have great jobs, since it was obvious that CCR curriculum was not universal, because post-secondary institutions were being given the latitude of blocking immigrants from attendance. Why were secondary schools pushing these students to

work hard, and excel academically, when they were being systematically denied the career and college opportunities that were being promised?

I would better understand this discriminatory behavior when I studied CRT while enrolled in the Post Master's Certificate in School Administration (PMC) program in the Education Leadership and Cultural Foundations (ELC) department at UNCG. When I later entered the PhD program in the ELC department, I wanted to research this challenge that Latinx immigrants had to contend with, and this became my focus for dissertation research. I was encouraged to broaden the study to include all minoritized students, instead of just the Latinx population, and this resulted in a study which intended to document and analyze the experiences of African American, Latinx, and Native American students in North Carolina's secondary schools.

Critical Race Theory was chosen as the theoretical framework for the research project because the study was focused on the experiences of minoritized students who are often marginalized by society in a systemic fashion through the use of laws, policies, and institutional practices that disadvantage them. The goal of the study was to examine the perceptions of minoritized secondary school students, using a CRT lens, in the hopes of better understanding the impact of CCR curriculum on the careers and college educations of diverse student populations. In addition, the study sought to better understand how the goals for CCR curriculum standards were supported by the experiences of these students. The study was not intended as another indictment against public schooling, but rather an exploration of how CCR curriculum was preparing marginalized students for their futures, as opposed to the publicly advertised goals.

Art-Based Research was used as a methodology for data collection and the researcher-generated black and white photographs of the study participants' secondary schools were invaluable because they opened up critical conversations during the second-round interviews, which would not have been likely without the common understanding that visiting the school campuses created. The school photographs surprised the participants, and consequently provided a higher level of conversational intimacy during the second-round interviews. This increased rapport was due to several factors, including 1) the study participants' appreciation of my investment of time and resources in order to better understand their narrative; 2) having a common geographic understanding of the space(s) where their narratives were situated; and 3) having new anecdotal stories arise because of questions I was asking about the details and intricacies of the physical school buildings and campuses. The photographs also provided another element for verifying the reliability of the participants' narratives because they were able to provide a geographic context for some of the incidents and experiences that they described.

While the photographs were useful for photo-elicitation and validation of the study participants' narratives, the Art-Based Research methodology was not fully utilized in the research project. This was problematic for a host of reasons including my decision to limit the number of pictures of each school that would be included in the dissertation, as well as my discomfort with photographing the communities and people who surrounded each school. Since these additional pictures were either not taken, or were not included in the final draft, there is a clear void which forces the reader to rely upon my interpretation of the additional scenes which I personally witnessed but chose to omit. The consequence of these decisions is an over-reliance upon the researcher's perspective, which might be distorted by either my positionality or other internal biases. My reluctance to photograph others is borne of personal colonial and post-

colonial experiences where I both witnessed, and personally experienced voyeuristic exploitation

conducted through the lens of a camera. Unfortunately, my personal apprehensions led to

curating decisions which limited the field of view that the readers have with regards to the

schools in the study, and the visual contexts surrounding them. In hindsight, it would have been

prudent to proactively ask school staff, or administrators, for permission to access more space on

each campus so that additional visual perspectives could have been framed by the camera. These

additional photographs would have provided the opportunity for including a more diverse range

of pictures, of each campus, so that a panoramic portrayal could have been achieved. This

expansive view of each school would have provided the reader with valuable visual data to help

them formulate their own meanings, and understandings, with regards to the spaces which were

central to the narratives of the study participants.

One of the primary benefits of undertaking an Art-Based Research methodology was

gaining insights into how the form of inquiry might be utilized by educators for the purpose of

improving the college and career readiness of students on their school campuses. School

counselors, at all grade levels, could visit college campuses to take pictures which they could

later share with students to provide them with virtual access to campuses which they might not

have the opportunity to visit in person. In addition, counselors could take pictures, with

intentionality, to show students particular aspects of college life which could be meaningful for

their understanding of the college experience. Pictures could also be taken to compare and

contrast what life might look like on a community college campus as opposed to a four-year

college with residence halls, and the accompanying social dynamics. Likewise, pictures from an

HBCU could be used to visually show how similar and different predominantly Black campuses

are when juxtaposed against predominantly White schools. These pictures could be shown to

students, along with the promotional materials that colleges provide, so that they might have a more intimate and genuine glimpse of postsecondary education. School leaders could also use photography to document the school's physical features over time, providing students and visitors with the opportunity to make judgements about the school's physical changes as the building passes through successive generations. The use of ABR, as a methodology, rekindled my enthusiasm for engaging my surroundings through the medium of black and white photography, while also suggesting additional uses for educators in a wide range of applications.

The spontaneous nature of the focus group discussion was significant in terms of research data, because the researcher was thrust into the background and the study participants gained agency which they utilized to discuss the elements of CCR which were important to them. While guiding questions were used to prime the conversations, the study participants were able to fully express themselves because they were not interrupted or guided by my personal agenda, and this led to conversations which were invaluable for the research project. A second focus group meeting would have been helpful for the project, since it is likely that additional untapped issues or themes may have been discussed. Originally, I had hoped to have all six second-round participants meet together, but after conducting the focus group meeting with only three individuals, I now realize that three to four participants is optimal for meaningful discussions

The study found that CCR curriculum is not consistently delivered to minoritized students who face bias and other obstacles which disrupt their ability to have equal access to colleges and universities. Unfortunately, the study was not able to successfully investigate career placement, because most of the participants were in the process of completing their college degrees, during the first-round interviews, and only one of them was working in a career occupation. The information provided by the study participants was fully relevant for studying

the college matriculation outcomes associated with CCR practices, but career placement was limited to anecdotal stories about some of their high school classmates. The study found that in general, minoritized students were not being served with fidelity by their school counselors, and that tracking practices, which appeared to favor affluent White students, were preventing them from fully realizing their college preparatory potential. In addition, they expressed concerns that students of color were being specifically targeted for military enlistment and they resented the records access that the armed services legally had, which provided data for recruitment efforts. These findings confirm the work of critical race theorists like Yosso, Gay, Ladson-Billings, Delgado et al. (2017), and many others, who suggest that race is a primary determinant in explaining distortions and inequitable practices in society writ large. The study participants also brought to the forefront broader practices like district attendance zones, which further limit equitable access to a rigorous, high-quality education.

The participants in the study also contributed to the CCR curriculum discourse by providing valuable information about the resources which they found most beneficial during their college preparatory journeys. They had praise for teachers and staff who advocated for students and provided them with the social capital which helped many of them to navigate the path to successful college matriculation. Likewise, there was considerable praise for early college exposure programs, including early colleges, middles colleges, and dual enrollment, which allowed them to experience the rigors of college coursework while also earning college transfer credits in high school. Community colleges were also credited for their role in providing a transitional setting for students who were not ready to attend a four-year university, while also providing them with additional college preparation that would pave their way for success when they transferred to a traditional college or university. These insights were invaluable for policy

289

recommendations, for improving CCR curriculum, so that it better serves the college and career needs of minoritized students in North Carolina.

The findings of this project suggest that there is hope for reform of CCR curriculum as it is delivered and experienced by minority students in North Carolina. First and foremost, legislation must be enacted by the General Assembly to guarantee equal access for immigrant students to both the university and community college systems. District and zoning practices must also be reformed in order to provide all students with equal access to the best schools and the most rigorous curriculum that they desire in each individual school. The quantity and quality of secondary school guidance counselors must be improved so that every student, without regard for their demographic markers, has regular access to a counselor who is an advocate for their college and career aspirations. Successful CCR pathways must be nurtured, and this means an expansion of the role of community colleges and CTE programs in secondary education, as well as other career and college preparatory programs like HOSA, AVID, and High School Connections. Finally, all teachers and school staff should receive culturally responsive training so that they can work to create an educational environment which is free of stereotype threat and characterized by high expectations for all students. To ensure that teachers are working to create an educational environment that is free of stereotypes and racial/ethnic bias, teacher observation instruments must include evaluation of cultural climate and responsiveness. These policy recommendations may appear to be untenable, but they are necessary if North Carolina intends to honor its CCR promise that all students will be college and career ready when they graduate from high school, so that they are fully prepared for postsecondary educational opportunities and meaningful occupational engagement.

I encourage future study of CCR curriculum and its impact on the lives of minoritized secondary school students in North Carolina. The topic is of sufficient importance that it merits further inquiry, and the acknowledged limitations of this study highlight the fact that important voices were not represented, including the experiences of Native American and Asian students, as well as individuals who dropped out of high school or college, attended vocational/technical programs, or went directly into the workforce after graduating from high school. Not only are these narratives important for better understanding the impact of CCR curriculum, but the quality of their adult lives is also important in a just society, which provides equal opportunities for everyone without regard for race, ethnicity, gender, or socioeconomic status.

REFERENCES

2023-2024 Magnet Stop Hubs. (2022). *Transportation.* Retrieved March 2, 2024 from

    https://www.wsfcs.k12.nc.us/Page/124280

Acevedo-Gil (2016). Critical race study on college choice: Racialization in school culture and

    climate. In G.Q. Conchas (Ed.). *Cracks in the schoolyard: Confronting latino educational*

    inequality, (pp. 37-53). Teachers College Press.

Agee, J. (2009). Developing qualitative research questions: A reflective process. *International*

    Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education, *22*(4), 431–447.

    https://doi.org/10.1080/09518390902736512

ACT Inc. (2008). The forgotten middle: Ensuring that all students are on target for college and

    career readiness before high school. *College Readiness.* Retrieved March 23, 2022

    from https://www.act.org/content/dam/act/unsecured/documents/ForgottenMiddle.pdf

ACT Inc. (2014). Using your act explore® results. *ACT Explore*. Retrieved March 21, 2022

    from https://www.act.org/content/dam/act/unsecured/documents/Explore-

    UsingYourResults.pdf

Alegrado, A., & Winsler, A. (2020). Predictors of taking elective music courses in middle school

    among low-ses, ethnically diverse students in miami. *Journal of Research in Music*

    Education, *68*(1), 5–30.

Allen, Q., and Metcalf, H.S. (2019) "Up to no good": The intersection of race, gender, and

    fear of black men in us society. In T.D. Boyce & W.M. Chunnu (Eds.). *Historicizing*

    fear: Ignorance, vilification, and othering (pp. 19-34). University Press of Colorado.

    Retrieved December 5, 2023, from https://muse.jhu.edu/book/73106

Alvarado, S. E., & An, B. P. (2015). Race, friends, and college readiness: Evidence from the high school longitudinal study. *Race and Social Problems*, *7*(2), 150–167. https://doi.org/10.1007/s12552-015-9146-5

Arbor Village High, (2023). Retrieved September 28, 2023 from https://www.wcpss.net/domain/6838

Arcidiacono, P., & Koedel, C. (2013). Race and college success: Evidence from missouri. *Working Paper Series, 19188*(19188). https://www.nber.org/system/files/working_papers/w19188/w19188.pdf

Armstrong, S. L., Stahl, N. A., & King, J. R. (2021). What does it mean to be college-ready for career technical education? *Community College Review*, *49*(2), 131–155. https://doi.org/10.1177/0091552120982031

Arriero, E., & Griffin, D. (2019). ¡Adelante! A community asset mapping approach to increase college and career readiness for rural latinx high school students. *Professional School Counseling*, *22*(1). https://doi.org/10.1177/2156759X18800279

Aspray, W. (2016). *Women and underrepresented minorities in computing: A historical and social study* (Ser. History of computing). Springer. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-24811-0

Astramovich, R. L., & Harris, K. R. (2007). Promoting self-advocacy among minority students in school counseling. *Journal of Counseling and Development,* 85(3), 269–276. https://doi.org/10.1002/j.1556-6678.2007.tb00474.x

Aulck, L., & West, J. (2017). Attrition and performance of community college transfers. *Plos One*, 12(4). https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0174683

Aurora Middle School. (2022). Retrieved October 20, 2023, from

    https://www.gcsnc.com/Welborn_Academy_of_Science_and_Technology

Ball, M., & Smith, G. (2020). Ethnomethodology and the visual practices of looking,

    visualization, and embodied action. In Pauwels, L., & Mannay, D. (Eds.). *The*

    sage handbook of visual research methods (2nd ed., pp. 413-433). SAGE.

    Retrieved April 16, 2022, from https://methods-sagepub-

    com.libproxy.uncg.edu/book/the-sage-handbook-of-visual-research-methods-2e

Bass, K. M., Hu Dahl, I., & Panahandeh, S. (2016). Designing the game: How a project-based

    media production program approaches steam career readiness for underrepresented young

    adults. *Journal of Science Education and Technology*, *25*(6), 1009–1024.

    https://doi.org/10.1007/s10956-016-9631-7

Benetteville Charter School. (2023). Retrieved October 22, 2023, from

    https://www.nhaschools.com/schools/forsyth-academy/en/6th-8th-grade

Bentrock Middle School. (2022). Retrieved October 23, 2023, from

    https://www.gcsnc.com/Page/75

Berger, John. 1992. *Keeping a Rendezvous*. New York: Vintage International.

Bhattacharya, K. (2017). *Fundamentals of qualitative research: A practical guide*.

    Routledge/Taylor. Retrieved April 16, 2022, from https://www-

    taylorfrancis.com.libproxy.uncg.edu/books/mono/10.4324/9781315231747/fundamentals

    -qualitative-research-kakali-bhattacharya

Bloch, S., & Brasdefer, T. (2023). Edward w. soja's radical spatial perspective. *Human*

    Geography, *16*(3), 233–243. https://doi.org/10.1177/19427786231175849

Bochner, A., & Riggs, N. (2014). Practicing narrative inquiry. In Leavy, P. (Ed.). (2014). *The oxford handbook of qualitative research* (pp. 195-22). Oxford University Press. Retrieved April 16, 2022, from https://ebookcentral-proquest-com.libproxy.uncg.edu/lib/uncg/detail.action?docID=1657789#

Bonilla-Silva, E. (2015). The structure of racism in color-blind, "post-racial" america. *American Behavioral Scientist*, *59*(11), 1358–1376. Retrieved on September 15, 2020 from https://journals-sagepub-com.libproxy.uncg.edu/doi/10.1177/0002764215586826

Bonilla-Silva, E. (2018). *Racism without racists: Color-blind racism and the persistence of racial inequality in america* (Fifth). Rowman & Littlefield.

Bonner, F.A., & Murry, J.W. (2012). Inside information on high-achieving african american male college students. In J.L. Moore, & C.W. Lewis (Eds.). *African american students in urban schools: Critical issues and solutions for achievement* (pp. 271-288). Peter Lang.

Bottoms, G. (2022). *Tomorrow's high school: Creating student pathways for both college and career*. Association for Supervision & Curriculum Development. Retrieved December 1, 2023, from https://public.ebookcentral.proquest.com/choice/PublicFullRecord.aspx?p=29381352

Bowen, C. L., Johnson, A. W., & Powell, K. G. (2020). Critical analyses of outcomes of marginalized undergraduate engineering students. *2020 IEEE Frontiers in Education Conference (FIE) Uppsala, Sweden 2020 Oct. 21 - 2020 Oct. 24.* (pp. 1–9). IEEE. https://doi.org/10.1109/FIE44824.2020.9273827

Bowen, W. G., Chingos, M. M., McPherson, M. S., & Tobin, E. M. (2009). *Crossing the finish line: Completing college at america's public universities*. Princeton University Press.

Bradbury, A. (2014). Identity performance and race: The use of critical race theory in

    understanding institutional racism and discrimination in schools. In R. Race,

    & V. Lander (Eds.). *Advancing race and ethnicity in education* (pp. 17-31). Palgrave

    Macmillan. Retrieved December 4, 2023, from https://link-springer-

    com.libproxy.uncg.edu/book/10.1057/9781137274762

Brinkman, S. (2014). Unstructured and structured interviewing. In Leavy, P. (Ed.). *The*

    oxford handbook of qualitative research (pp. 277-299). Oxford

    University Press. Retrieved April 16, 2022, from https://ebookcentral-proquest-

    com.libproxy.uncg.edu/lib/uncg/detail.action?docID=1657789#

Brown, D. N. (1992). School counselors facing budget ax. *The Washington Post*, *Vaf1*, 1.

Brown, E. (2015). High school graduation rates increase. *The Washington Post*, *A.3*, 3.

Buddin, R. J., & Kapur, K., Kapur, K. (2002). Tuition assistance usage and first-term military

    retention. *Office of the Secretary of Defense, & National Defense Research Institute*.

    Rand. Retrieved March 1, 2024 from

    https://www.rand.org/content/dam/rand/pubs/monograph_reports/2005/MR1295.pdf

Buffington High School. (2023) Retrieved September 28, 2023 from

    https://www.hendersoncountypublicschoolsnc.org/hhs/about/

Buras, K.L. (2022). Let's be for real: Critical race theory, racial realism, and education policy

    analysis (toward a new paradigm). In M. Lynn, & A.D. Dixon (Eds.). *Handbook of*

    Critical Race Theory in Education (2nd ed., pp. 216-231). Routledge. Retrieved

    November 12, 2023, from https://doi-org.libproxy.uncg.edu/10.4324/9781351032223

Burciaga, E. (2016). The promise and reality of plyler v. doe: Community resistance to the

    school-to-deportation pipeline. In G.Q. Conchas (Ed.). *Cracks in the schoolyard:*

    confronting latino educational inequality, (pp. 161-178). Teachers College Press.

Burke, R. J., & Mattis, M. C. (2007). *Women and minorities in science, technology, engineering,*

    and mathematics: Upping the numbers. Edward Elgar.

Burris High School, (2022). Retrieved October 13, 2023 from

    https://www.duplinschools.net/Page/4395

Byrd, W. C. (2017). *Poison in the ivy: Race relations and the reproduction of inequality on elite*

    college campuses (Ser. The american campus). Rutgers University Press.

    https://doi.org/10.36019/9780813589398

Cappelli, P. (2015). *Will college pay off?: A guide to the most important financial decision you'll*

    ever make. Public Affairs. Retrieved May 2, 2022, from https://ebookcentral-proquest-

    com.libproxy.uncg.edu/lib/uncg/detail.action?docID=2039751

Carrell, S.E. & Kurlaender, M. (2016) Estimating the Productivity of Community

    Colleges in Paving the Road to Four-Year Success. *Working Paper Series*, 22904.

    Retrieved November 27, 2023 from https://uncg.on.worldcat.org/oclc/6900226775

Carter, D. J. (2008). Achievement as resistance: The development of a critical race achievement

    ideology among Black achievers. *Harvard Educational Review*, 78(3), 466–497.

Carter, P. L., Skiba, R., Arredondo, M. I., & Pollock, M. (2017). You can't fix what you don't

    look at: Acknowledging race in addressing racial discipline disparities. *Urban*

    Education, *52*(2), 207–235. https://doi.org/10.1177/0042085916660350

Castro, E. L. (2013). Racialized readiness for college and career: Toward an equity-grounded

    social science of intervention programming. *Community College Review*, *41*(4), 292–310.

Castro, E.L. (2015). Not ready for college, but ready for the military: A policy challenge for the college- and career-readiness agenda. *Education Policy Analysis Archives*, *23*. https://doi.org/10.14507/epaa.v23.1887

Chamberlain High School. (2022). Retrieved October 28, 2023, from https://www.gcsnc.com/domain/720

Chapman, T. K., Contreras, F., Comeaux, e., Martinez Jr., E., & Rodriguez, G.M. (2020). *High achieving african american students and the college choice process: Applying critical race theory*. Routledge. Retrieved December 4, 2023, from https://www-taylorfrancis-com.libproxy.uncg.edu/books/mono/10.4324/9780429330278/high-achieving-african-american-students-college-choice-process-thandeka-chapman-frances-contreras-eddie-comeaux-gloria-rodriguez-eligio-martinez-jr.

City Heights Early College, (2022). Retrieved September 23, 2023, from https://www.gcsnc.com/domain/534

Clandinin, D.J. (2013). *Engaging in Narrative Inquiry* (1st ed.). Routledge. https://doi-org.libproxy.uncg.edu/10.4324/9781315429618

Coffey, A., & Atkinson, P. (1996). *Making sense of qualitative data: Complementary research strategies*. SAGE Publications.

Cole, A., & Knowles, J.G. (2008). Arts-informed research. In J.G. Knowles and A.L. Cole (Eds.). *Handbook of the arts in qualitative research: Perspective, methodologies, examples, and issues* (pp. 55-70). Sage.

Cohn-Vargas, B., Creer Kahn, A., & Epstein, A. (2021). *Identity safe classrooms, grades 6-12: Pathways to belonging and learning* (First). Corwin. Retrieved December 2, 2023, from https://sk-sagepub-com.libproxy.uncg.edu/books/identity-safe-classrooms-grades-6-12

Cole, M. (2017). *Critical race theory and education: A marxist response* (Second, Ser. Marxism and education). Palgrave Macmillan. Retrieved on December 1, 2023, from https://doi.org/10.1057/978-1-349-95079-9

Conchas, G. Q. (2016). *Cracks in the schoolyard: Confronting latino educational inequality*. Teachers College Press.

Conley, D. T. (2010). *College and career ready: Helping all students succeed beyond high school* (1st ed.). Jossey-Bass.

Crampton, J. W., & Elden, S. (2007). Introduction. *Space, knowledge and power: Foucault and geography*. Ashgate.

Crandall County School District. (2022). Retrieved October 16, 2023, from https://www.wsfcs.k12.nc.us/Page/39665

Curry, J., & Milsom, A. (2014). *Career counseling in p-12 schools*. Springer Publishing Company. Retrieved December 1, 2023, from https://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/uncg/reader.action?docID=1352420

Curry, J., & Milsom, A. (2017). Career and college readiness counseling in p-12 schools (2nd ed.). Springer Publishing Company. Retrieved March 2, 2024, from https://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/uncg/reader.action?docID=4813510

Cut to the core: College readiness vs. career training. (2014) *Publishers Weekly*, *261*(45).

D'Amico, M., Salas, S., Gonzalez-Canche, M.S., Rios-Aguilar, C., & Rutherford, G.F. (2017). Ways of knowing, community/technical college workforce (re)development, and "*el mundo de hoy.*" In S. Salas & P.R. Portes (Eds.) *Us latinization: Education and the new latino south* (pp. 89-108). SUNY Press.

Dahms, H.F. (2009). Retheorizing global space. In B. Warf, & S. Arias, (Eds.). *The spatial turn: Interdisciplinary perspectives* (pp. 88-101). Routledge.

Dalesio, E.P. (2016). Forest wants revamp to too-negative charter school report. *Citizen Times* (January 8, 2016). Retrieved November 20, 2023, from https://www.citizen-times.com/story/news/2016/01/08/forest-wants-revamp-negative-charter-school-report/78496424/

Davis, J., & Jett, C. C. (Eds.). (2019). *Critical race theory in mathematics education*. Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group. https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315121192

Davis, N. (2018). Getting real about high school graduation rates. *Philadelphia Tribune*, *10a*, 10.

DeCuir, J. T., & Dixson, A. D. (2004). "So when it comes out, they aren't that surprised that it is there": using critical race theory as a tool of analysis of race and racism in education. *Educational Researcher*, *33*(5), 26–31.

DeCuir-Gunby, J. (2006). "Proving your skin is white, you can have everything": Race, racial identity, and property rights in whiteness in the supreme court case of josephine decuir. In Dixson, A. D., Anderson, C. R., & Donner, J. K. (Eds.). *Critical race theory in education: All god's children got a song* (pp. 89-111). Routledge.

Delgado, R., Stefancic, J., and Harris, A. (2012). *Critical race theory: An introduction* (2nd ed.). New York University Press. Retrieved December 4, 2023, from https://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/uncg/reader.action?docID=3025555

Delgado, R., Stefancic, J., & Harris, A. (2017). *Critical race theory: An introduction*. New York University Press.

Delpit, L. (2012). *"Multiplication is for white people: Raising expectations for other people's children*. New Press.

Demerath, P., Lynch, J., & Davidson, M. (2008). Dimensions of psychological capital in a u.s.

suburb and high school: Identities for neoliberal times. *Anthropology & Education*

Quarterly, 39(3), 270–292.

Denzin, N. (2009). The elephant in the living room: Or extending the conversation about the

politics of evidence. *Qualitative Research*, *9*(2), 139–160.

Denzin, N. K., & Lincoln, Y. S. (2018). *The sage handbook of qualitative research* (5th ed.).

Sage.

Dexter, J. C. (2020). Human resources challenges of military to civilian employment

transitions. *Career Development International*, *25*(5), 481–500.

https://doi.org/10.1108/CDI-02-2019-0032

Diamond, J. B. (2006). Still separate and unequal: Examining race, opportunity, and school

achievement in 'Integrated' suburbs. *Journal of Negro Education*, 75(3), 495–505.

Dikeç, M. (2001). Justice and the spatial imagination. *Environment and Planning A: Economy*

and Space, *33*(10), 1785–1805. https://doi.org/10.1068/a3467

Dikeç, M. (2015). *Space, politics and aesthetics* (Ser. Taking on the political). Edinburgh

University Press. Retrieved January 20, 2024, from https://www-jstor-

org.libproxy.uncg.edu/stable/10.3366/j.ctt16r0hp7

Dixson, A. (2011). Democracy now? Race, education, and black self-determination. *Teachers*

College Record, *113*(4), 811–830.

Dixson, A., & Rousseau, C. (2006). And we are still not saved: Critical race theory in education

ten years later. In Dixson, A. D., Anderson, C. R., & Donner, J. K. (Eds.). *Critical race*

theory in education: All god's children got a song (pp. 31-54). Routledge.

Douglass Horsford, S., & Grosland, T.J. (2022). Badges of inferiority: The racialization of

    achievement in u.s. education. In M. Lynn, & A.D. Dixon (Eds.). *Handbook of Critical*

    Race Theory in Education (2ⁿᵈ ed., pp. 153-166). Routledge. Retrieved November 12,

    2023, from https://doi-org.libproxy.uncg.edu/10.4324/9781351032223

Dunbar, C., & McNeal, L. (2012). Urban school administrators: A grassroots approach to no

    child left behind mandates. In J.L. Moore, & C.W. Lewis (Eds.). *African american*

    students in urban schools: Critical issues and solutions for achievement (pp. 207-230).

    Peter Lang.

Durand, T. M. (2020). Overcoming stereotypes to "master our dreams": The salience of

    ethnic climate and racial diversity among students of color in middle school. *The Journal*

    of Early Adolescence, 40(8), 1029–1060. https://doi.org/10.1177/0272431619891241

Erner, C., Goedde-Menke, M., & Oberste, M. (2016). Financial literacy of high school students:

    Evidence from germany. *The Journal of Economic Education*, 47(2), 95–105.

    https://doi.org/10.1080/00220485.2016.1146102

FAQs, (n.d.). *CMS School Choice.* Retrieved March 2, 2024 from https://cmschoice.org/faqs/

Farrell, J. (2003). Marketing their way to a better image; A campaign at high school is designed

    to rebuild community confidence in the district's flagship school. *Hartford Courant*,

    B3, 3.

Ferguson, A. (2010). *Bad boys: Public schools in the making of black masculinity.* University of

    Michigan Press.

Fletcher, E. (2012). Trends and patterns of career and technical education for urban african

    american students. In J.L. Moore, & C.W. Lewis (Eds.). *African american students in*

    urban schools: Critical issues and solutions for achievement (pp. 95-112). Peter Lang.

Fletcher, J., Lyon, G. R., Fuchs, L., & Barnes, M. A. (2018). *Learning disabilities: from identification to intervention* (Second). Guilford Press. Retrieved April 16, 2022, from https://ebookcentralproquest.com.libproxy.uncg.edu/lib/uncg/reader.action?docID=5508451

Flores, S. M., & Oseguera, L. (2009). The community college and undocumented immigrant students across state contexts: Localism and public policy. *Yearbook of the National Society for the Study of Education*, *108*(1), 63–85.

Flores, S., & Southern, K. G. (2010). Citizenship, college degrees, and occupational outcomes: Comparison of latino immigrants and u.s. natives at the turn of the century. *Journal of Hispanic Higher Education*, *9*(1), 22–42.

Flynn, T. (2007). Foucault among the geographers. In J. Crampton, & S. Elden, (Eds.). *Space, knowledge and power: Foucault and geography* (pp. 59-64). Ashgate.

Freeman, K. (2004). *African Americans and college choice*. New York: SUNY Press. Retrieved December 3, 2023 from https://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/uncg/detail.action?docID=3407739

Freund, A., & Thomson, A. (2011). Introduction. *Oral history and photography*. Palgrave Macmillan. Retrieved January 19, 2024 from https://link-springer-com.libproxy.uncg.edu/book/10.1057/9780230120099

Gaertner, M. N., & Larsen McClarty, K. (2015). Performance, perseverance, and the full picture of college readiness. *Educational Measurement, Issues and Practice*, *34*(2), 20–20.

Galloway, F. J. (1994). Inferential sturdiness and the 1917 army alpha: A new look at the robustness of educational quality indices as determinants of interstate black-white score differentials. *The Journal of Negro Education*, *63*(2), 251–251.

Garza Mitchell, R. L. (2017). Online career and technical education in the community

    college. *Community College Journal of Research and Practice*, *41*(6), 336–340.

    https://doi.org/10.1080/10668926.2016.1270242

Gay, G. (2014). Race and ethnicity in us education. In R. Race, & V. Lander, (Eds.).

    Advancing race and ethnicity in education (pp. 63-81). Palgrave Macmillan. Retrieved

    December 4, 2023, from https://link-springer-

    com.libproxy.uncg.edu/book/10.1057/9781137274762

George Mwangi, C. A. (2018). "It's different here": Complicating concepts of college

    knowledge and first generation through an immigrant lens. *Teachers College*

    Record, *120*(11), 1–1.

George Mwangi, C. A., Cabrera, A. F., & Kurban, E. R. (2018). Connecting school and home:

    Examining parental and school involvement in readiness for college through multilevel

    sem. *Research in Higher Education -New York*, *60*(4), 553–575.

Gillborn, G. (2014). Racism as policy: A critical race analysis of education reforms in the

    united states and england, *The Educational Forum,* 78(1), 26-41.

Gillborn, D. (2022). The policy of inequity: Using crt to unmask white supremacy in education

    policy. In M. Lynn, & A.D. Dixon (Eds.). *Handbook of Critical Race Theory in*

    Education (pp. 129-139). Routledge. Retrieved November 12, 2023, from https://doi-

    org.libproxy.uncg.edu/10.4324/9781351032223

Glesne, C. (2016). *Becoming qualitative researchers: An introduction* (Fifth). Pearson.

Green, S., Sanczyk, A., Chambers, C., Mraz, M., & Polly, D. (2023). College and career

    readiness: A literature synthesis. *Journal of Education*, 203(1), 22-229.

    Retrieved September 25, 2023 from https://doi.org/10.1177/00220574211002209

Gridgeview Middle School. (n.d.). Retrieved October 19, 2023, from

    https://www.cmsk12.org/southcharlotteMS

Gutierrez-Ocampo, R. (2020). High-performing latinx students: External agents and student-

    college match. In Aquino, K. C., & Hudes, R. P. (Eds.). *Improving postsecondary choice*

    and pathways: Student access and college match (pp. 86-112). Routledge, Taylor &

    Francis Group. https://doi-org.libproxy.uncg.edu/10.4324/9780429430848

Hallett, M. A. (2006). *Private prisons in america: A critical race perspective*. University of

    Illinois Press.

Hallett, R. E., & Venegas, K. M. (2011). Is increased access enough? Advanced placement

    courses, quality, and success in low-income urban schools. *Journal for the Education of*

    the Gifted, 34(3), 468–487.

Harper, D. (1998). An argument for visual sociology. In Prosser, J. (1998). *Image-based*

    research: A sourcebook for qualitative researchers (pp. 20-35). Falmer Press.

Harris, P. N., Gonzalez, L. M., Kearney, B., & Ingram, K. (2020). Finding their sparck: College

    and career readiness groups for african american females. *Journal for Specialists in*

    Group Work, *45*(1), 40–55. https://doi.org/10.1080/01933922.2019.1702128

Harvey, M., & Holly, B. P. (1981). *Themes in geographic thought*. St. Martin's Press.

Hatch, J. A. (2002). *Doing qualitative research in education settings* (Ser. Book collections on

    project muse). State University of New York Press. Retrieved March 12, 2022, from

    https://ebookcentralproquestcom.libproxy.uncg.edu/lib/uncg/detail.action?docID=

    3408084

Hayes, K. (2007). Report: High school grads unprepared for college. *Mcclatchy - Tribune*

    Business News, *1*, 1–1.

Heckman, J. J., & LaFontaine, P. A. (2010). The american high school graduation rate: Trends and levels. *The Review of Economics and Statistics*, *92*(2), 244–244.

Henry, K.L. (2021). A movement in two acts: Actually existing racism, critical race theory, and the charter school movement. In M. Lynn, & A.D. Dixon (Eds.). *Handbook of Critical Race Theory in Education* (pp. 427-439). Routledge. https://doi.org/10.4324/9781351032223

Hilton, Y. R., & Gray, M. (2017). Improving minority student persistence: An institutional factors approach. In M. Gray, & K. Thomas, (Eds.). *Strategies for Increasing Diversity in Engineering Majors and Careers* (pp. 1-25). IGI Global. https://doi-org.libproxy.uncg.edu/10.4018/978-1-5225-2212-6.ch001

Hines, E. M., Harris, P. C., Mayes, R. D., & Moore III, J. L. (2020). I think of college as setting a good foundation for my future. *Journal for Multicultural Education*, 14(2), 129–147. https://doi.org/10.1108/JME-09-2019-0064

Hirschman, C. (2016). *From high school to college: Gender, immigrant generation, and race-ethnicity*. Russell Sage Foundation. Retrieved April 8, 2022, from https://www-jstor-org.libproxy.uncg.edu/stable/10.7758/9781610448574

Hodge, S. R., Harrison, L., Burden, J. W., & Dixson, A. D. (2008). Brown in black and white—then and now. *The American Behavioral Scientist*, *51*(7), 928–952. https://doi.org/10.1177/0002764207311998

Holm, G. (2014). Photography as a method. In Leavy, P. (Ed.). (2014). *The oxford handbook of qualitative research* (pp. 380-402). Oxford University Press. Retrieved April 16, 2022, from https://ebookcentral-proquest-com.libproxy.uncg.edu/lib/uncg/detail.action?docID=1657789#

Homepage for Students for Teachers Project partners. (n.d.), Retrieved October 5, 2023 from

    https://museumofdurhamhistory.org/beneathourfeet/landmarks/Chewning

Hoogeveen, P. (2009). A new agenda for improving high school graduation rates. *The Hispanic*

    Outlook in Higher Education, *19*(15), 28–29.

Hooker, S., & Brand, B. (2010). College knowledge: A critical component of college and career

    readiness. *New Directions for Youth Development*, *2010*(127), 75–85.

    https://doi.org/10.1002/yd.364

Hunter Quartz, K., Murillo, M. A., Trinchero, B., Neri, R., & Jacobo, S. (2019). Framing,

    supporting, and tracking college-for-all reform: A local case of public scholarship. *The*

    High School Journal, *102*(2), 159–182.

Huxley, M. (2007). Geographies of governmentality. In J. Crampton, & S. Elden, (Eds.).

    Space, knowledge and power: Foucault and geography (pp. 185-204). Ashgate.

Hyslop, A. (2006). Establishing a clear system goal of career and college readiness, for all

    students. *Techniques: Connecting Education & Careers*, *81*(6).

Inzlicht, M., & Schmader, T. (2012). *Stereotype threat: Theory, process, and application*.

    Oxford University Press.

Jackson Middle School. (2022). Retrieved October 26, 2023, from

    https://www.gcsnc.com/swann_middle_school

Jackson, R. R. (2011). *How to plan rigorous instruction* (Ser. Mastering the principles of great

    teaching series). ADCD. Retrieved November 28, 2023, from

    https://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/uncg/detail.action?docID=668908

Jahangir, T., Piper, K., Ash, M., Elder, A., Renfro, T., Ramirez, M., & Woods-Jaeger, B. (2021). 'They only come after the black kid': Understanding the perceptions of discipline disparities among school staff, parents, and students of color. *Injury Prevention*, 27 (Suppl 3), 17. https://doi.org/10.1136/injuryprev-2021-SAVIR.43

Jain, D., Bernal Melendez, S. N., & Herrera, A. R. (2020). *Power to the transfer: Critical race theory and a transfer receptive culture*. Michigan State University Press. Retrieved December 4, 2023, from

https://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/uncg/detail.action?docID=5977002

Jamison Arts School. (n.d.). Retrieved October 18, 2023, from

https://www.cmsk12.org/northwestHS

Jefferson Early College. (2022). Retrieved October 4, 2023, from https://dpsnc.net/domain/55

Jeffries, R., & Silvernail, L. (2017). Barriers to black student enrollment in honors and advanced placement courses. *Negro Educational Review*, *68*(1-4), 56–79.

Jensen, K. B. (Ed.). (2021). *A handbook of media and communication research: Qualitative and quantitative methodologies* (3rd ed.). Routledge. Retrieved January 30, 2022, from

http://www.routledge.com.libproxy.uncg.edu/

Jobling, P. (2016). Using photographs in social and historical research by penny tinkler. *Visual Studies*, *31*(3), 284–285. https://doi.org/10.1080/1472586X.2015.1110435

Joyce, K. E., & Cartwright, N. (2018). Meeting our standards for educational justice: Doing our best with the evidence. *Theory and Research in Education*, *16*(1), 3–22.

Johnson, L., & Larwin, K. H. (2020). Systemic bias in public education: The exception of african american males enrolled in gifted and advanced placement courses. *Journal of Organizational and Educational Leadership*, *6*(2).

Johnson, S. L., Tandon, S. D., & Cheng, T. L. (2015). Career readiness: A potential pathway through which urban youth's exposure to stress influences adult health. *Journal of Community Psychology*, *43*(3), 321–321.

Kanno, Y., & Harklau, L. (2012). *Linguistic minority students go to college: Preparation, access, and persistence*. Taylor & Francis. Retrieved April 18, 2022, from https://public.ebookcentral.proquest.com/choice/publicfullrecord.aspx?p=956953

Kleykamp, M. A. (2006). College, jobs, or the military? Enlistment during a time of war*. *Social Science Quarterly*, *87*(2), 272–290. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1540-6237.2006.00380.x

Khalifa, M. (2013). Promoting our students: Examining the role of school leadership in the self-advocacy of at-risk students. *Journal of School Leadership*, 23(5), 751–788.

Kilbourn, B. (2006). The qualitative doctoral dissertation proposal. *Teachers College Record. 108(4). 529-576.*

Klopfenstein, K., & Thomas, M. K. (2009). The link between advanced placement experience and early college success. *Southern Economic Journal*, *75*(3), 873–891.

Knox, J., Alvarez, A., Golden, A., & Hope, E.C. (2023). Increasing Readiness for Cultural Responsiveness and Trauma-Informed Practice: Collective and Individual Readiness. In B. Alexander-Ashley, (Ed.). (2023). *Practical strategies to reduce childhood trauma and mitigate exposure to the school-to-prison pipeline* (pp. 229-260). IGI Global, Information Science Reference. Retrieved December 2, 2023, from https://www-igi-global-com.libproxy.uncg.edu/gateway/book/297024

Kolluri, S. (2021). Rigor restricted: Unequal participation in advanced placement. *Phi Delta Kappan*, 102(4), 1–1.

Lacy, A. (2019). Starting with students: A framework for high school reading. *English Journal*, 108(4), 17–20.

Ladson-Billings, G., & Tate, W. (2006). Towards a critical race theory of education. In A.D. Dixson, C.R. Anderson, & J.K. Donner (Eds.). *Critical race theory in education: All god's children got a song* (pp. 11-30). Routledge.

Ladson-Billings, G., Tate, W. F., & Donnor, J. K. (2021). *Critical race theory in education: A scholar's journey* (Ser. Multicultural education series). Teachers College Press. Retrieved December 4, 2023, from

https://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/uncg/reader.action?docID=6718107

Lagotte, B. W. (2016). *Military recruiting in high schools*. Sense Publishers. Retrieved November 30, 2023, from https://link.springer.com/book/10.1007/978-94-6300-518-0

Lapan, S. D., Quartaroli, M. T., & Riemer, F. J. (2012). *Qualitative research: An introduction to methods and designs* (1st ed., Ser. Research methods for the social sciences). Jossey-Bass. Retrieved February 5, 2022, from https://www-oreilly-com.libproxy.uncg.edu/library/view/qualitative-research-an/9781118118832/?ar

Latinos 'fight for what is right'; Conference focuses on college tuition for illegal immigrants. (2005). *Greensboro News Record*, *B1*, 1.

LeBlanc, J., Ward, S., & LeBlanc, C. P. (2022). An elective high school cooking course improves students' cooking and food skills: A quasi-experimental study. *Canadian Journal of Public Health*, 113(5), 764–775. https://doi.org/10.17269/s41997-022-00660-6

Lefebvre, H. (1991). *The production of space*. (D. Nicholson-Smith, Trans.). Blackwell Publishing.

Lieber, R. (2013). Working to pay for college tuition, students battle mountain of costs. *The Ledger*, (March 3, 2013): *N/a*.

Leistyna, P. (2007). Neoliberal non-sense. In P. McLaren & J.L. Kincheloe (Eds.). *Critical pedagogy: Where are we now?* (pp. 97-126). Peter Lang.

Leonardo, Z. (2003). Reality on trial: Notes on ideology, education, and utopia. *Policy Futures in Education*, *1*(3), 504–525. https://doi.org/10.2304/pfie.2003.1.3.5

Leonardo, Z. (2004). The color of supremacy: Beyond the discourse of "white Privilege." *Educational Philosophy and Theory*, *36*(2), 137–152.

Leonardo, Z. (2007). The war on schools: Nclb, nation creation and the educational construction of whiteness. *Race, Ethnicity and Education*, *10*(3), 261–278.

Leonardo, Z. (2009). *Race, whiteness, and education.* Routledge.

Leonardo, Z., & Boas, E. (2022). Other kids' teachers: What children of color learn from white women and what this says about race, whiteness, and gender. In M. Lynn, & A.D. Dixon (Eds.). *Handbook of Critical Race Theory in Education* (pp. 313-324). Routledge. Retrieved November 12, 2023, from https://doi-org.libproxy.uncg.edu/10.4324/9781351032223

Leonardo, Z., & Dixon-Román, E. (2018). Post-colorblindness; Or, racialized speech after symbolic racism. *Educational Philosophy & Theory*, *50*(14).

Leonardo, Z., & Harris, A. P. (2013). Living with racism in education and society: Derrick bell's ethical idealism and political pragmatism. *Race, Ethnicity and Education*, *16*(4), 470–488.

Leonardo, Z., & Manning, L. (2017). White historical activity theory: Toward a critical

    understanding of white zones of proximal development. *Race Ethnicity and*

    Education, *20*(1), 15–29. https://doi.org/10.1080/13613324.2015.1100988

Lieffring, C. (2016). Hosa gives students chance to explore medical field. *The Columbus*

    Telegram, N/a.

Lincoln High School. (2022). Retrieved October 16, 2023, from

    https://www.wsfcs.k12.nc.us/reynolds

Lopez, J. K. (2010). *Undocumented students and the policies of wasted potential.* LFB Scholarly

    Pub. Retrieved on October 28, 2020 from

    https://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/uncg/detail.action?docID=1057823

Loughran, D. S., Martorell, P., Miller, T., & Klerman, J.A. (2011). The effect of military

    enlistment on earnings and education. *Rand Corporation, & Arroyo Center*. RAND.

    Retrieved March 1, 2024 from https://www.rand.org/content/dam/rand/pubs/-

    technical_reports/2011/RAND_TR995.sum.pdf

Lowe, G. (2010). In their voice: Lower secondary school students' beliefs about playing musical

    instruments, and the impact of the instrument lesson upon those beliefs. *Australian*

    Journal of Music Education, 2(2), 41–51.

Lynn, M. (2005). Critical race theory, Afrocentricity, and their relation to critical pedagogy. In

    Z. Leonardo (Ed.). *Critical pedagogy and race* (pp. 127-140). Blackwell.

Lowell Middle School, (2023). Retrieved September 30, 2023 from

    https://www.hendersoncountypublicschoolsnc.org/hms/about-us/

Martinez, M. A., & Welton, A. D. (2014). Examining college opportunity structures for students of color at high-"minority," high-poverty secondary schools in texas. *Journal of School Leadership*, 24(5), 800–841. https://doi.org/10.1177/105268461402400501

Martinez, R. R., Baker, S. B., & Young, T. (2017). Promoting career and college readiness, aspirations, and self-efficacy: Curriculum field test. *The Career Development Quarterly*, *65*(2), 173–188. https://doi.org/10.1002/cdq.12090

Maverick Middle School, (2023). Retrieved October 10, 2023 from https://www.wcpss.net/domain/5404

McAllen, D. K., Downs, G., Ascani, H. (2013). The relationship between prior military education and academic performance in an online technology management undergraduate program. *Portland International Conference on Management of Engineering & Technology* (pp. 2498–2501). Retrieved March 1, 2024 from https://www.picmet.org/db/member/proceedings/2013/data/papers/13R0114.pdf

McDonnell, L. M. (2009). 2009 presidential address: Repositioning politics in education's circle of knowledge. *Educational Researcher*, *38*(6), 417–427.

McGhie, T.E., & Piper, R.E. (2021) Family discussions of race impacting children's pk-12 schooling: Critical pedagogy. In T.S. Ransaw, & R. Majors (Eds.). *Teaching to close the achievement gap for students of color: Understanding the impact of factors outside the classroom* (pp. 79-91). Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group. https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003093855

McIntosh, P. (2020). *On privilege, fraudulence, and teaching as learning: Selected essays 1981—2019*. Routledge. Retrieved on October 20, 2020 from https://doi-org.libproxy.uncg.edu/10.4324/9781351133791

McLaren, P. (2015). *Pedagogy of insurrection: From resurrection to revolution* (Ser. Education and struggle: vol. 6). Peter Lang.

McLaren, P. (2016). *Life in schools: An introduction to critical pedagogy in the foundations of education* (Sixth). Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group. Retrieved November 25, 2023 from https://doi-org.libproxy.uncg.edu/10.4324/9781315633640

McClaren, P. (2017). Critical pedagogy: A look at the major concepts. In A. Darder, R.D. Torres, & M. Baltodano (Eds.). *The critical pedagogy reader* (pp. 56-78). Routledge.

McNiff, S. (2008). Art-based research. In J.G. Knowles and A.L. Cole (Eds.). *Handbook of the arts in qualitative research: Perspective, methodologies, examples, and issues* (pp. 29-40). Sage.

Michael, B. J. (2016). Pedagogy of financial education among college students. *Economics and Culture*, 13(2), 23–34. https://doi.org/10.1515/jec-2016-0017

Mooring, R. D., & Mooring, S. R. (2016). Predictors of timely baccalaureate attainment for underrepresented minority community college transfer students. *Community College Journal of Research and Practice*, *40*(8), 681–681.

More students need challenging courses; guilford county has boosted enrollment in advanced classes, but poor scores in some schools point to inadequate preparation or teaching. (2004). *Greensboro News Record*, *A8*, 8.

Morningstar, M. E., Lombardi, A., & Test, D. (2018). Including college and career readiness within a multitiered systems of support framework. *AERA Open*, *4*(1).

Morris, E. W., & Perry, B. L. (2017). Girls behaving badly? Race, gender, and subjective evaluation in the discipline of african american girls. *Sociology of Education*, *90*(2), 127–148. https://doi.org/10.1177/0038040717694876

Murillo, M. A., & Trinchero, B. (2019). Framing, supporting, and tracking college-for-all

    reform: A local case of public scholarship. *The High School Journal*, *102*(2), 159–182.

National Blue Ribbon Schools. (n.d.). In About, National Blue Ribbon Schools. Retrieved

    October 4, 2023 from https://nationalblueribbonschools.ed.gov/background/

Nagaoka, J., Farrington, C. A., Roderick, M., Allensworth, E., Keyes, T. S., Johnson, D. W., &

    Beechum, N. O. (2013). Readiness for college: The role of noncognitive factors and

    context. *Voices in Urban Education*, *38*(38), 45–52.

Nielsen, L. (2019). Father-daughter relationships: contemporary research and issues (Ser.

    Textbooks in family studies series). Routledge Academic.

Noddings, N. (2013). *Education and democracy in the 21st century*. Teachers College Press.

Noddings, N. (2015). A richer, broader view of education. *Society*, *52*(3), 232–236.

    https://doi.org/10.1007/s12115-015-9892-4

North Carolina School Report Cards. (2018). Retrieved September 28, 2023 from

    https://ncreports.ondemand.sas.com/src/school?school=450334&year=2018&lng=en

North Carolina School Report Cards. (2022). Retrieved September 28, 2023 from

    https://ncreports.ondemand.sas.com/src/school?school=450334&year=2022&lng=en

Olson, S., & Fagen, A. P. (2007). *Understanding interventions that encourage minorities to

    pursue research careers: Summary of a workshop*. National Academies Press. Retrieved

    April 22, 2022, from https://ebookcentral-

    proquestcom.libproxy.uncg.edu/lib/uncg/reader.action?docID=3378306

Oseguera, L., Flores, S. M., & Burciaga, E. (2010). Documenting implementation realities:

    Undocumented immigrant students in california and north carolina. *Journal of College

    Admission*, *206*(206), 37–43.

Ozuna, T., & Saenz, V. (2012). Undocumented students and the policies of wasted

    potential. *Review of Higher Education*, *35*(2), 346–348.

Park, T., Pearson, D., & Richardson, G. B. (2017). Curriculum integration: Helping career and

    technical education students truly develop college and career readiness. *Peabody*

    Journal of Education, *92*(2), 192–208. https://doi.org/10.1080/0161956X.2017.1302213

Parikh-Foxx, S., Martinez, R., Baker, S. B., & Olsen, J. (2020). Self-efficacy for enhancing

    students' career and college readiness: A survey of professional school

    counselors. *Journal of Counseling and Development, 98*(2), 183–192.

    https://doi.org/10.1002/jcad.12312

Patton, M. Q., (2002). *Qualitative research and evaluation methods* (3rd ed.). Sage Publications.

Paulson, A. (2010). No child left behind embraces 'college and career readiness.' *The Christian*

    Science Monitor, *10*, 10–10.

Pellegrino, J. (2015). Review of the book *The resegregation of schools: Education and race in*

    the twenty-first century, by J.K. Donnor & A.D. Dixson (Eds.). *Journal of Youth*

    Adolescence, 44, 2387-2390. DOI 10.1007/s10964-015-0366-1

Perakyla, A., & Ruusuvuori, J. (2018). Analyzing talk at text. In N.K. Denzin, & Y.S. Lincoln

    (Eds.). *The sage handbook of qualitative research* (5th ed., pp. 669-691). SAGE.

Perez, J.C., Oliva, N., & Parker, L. (2021). Racial failure normalized as correlational racism:

    Crt/latcrit and the education policy attack against Latinx populations. In M. Lynn, & A.D.

    Dixon (Eds.). *Handbook of Critical Race Theory in Education* (2nd ed., pp. 417-426).

    Routledge. Retrieved November 12, 2023, from https://doi-

    org.libproxy.uncg.edu/10.4324/9781351032223

Perlstein, L. (2004). Report disputes u.s. high school graduation rates. *The Washington Post*, *A.03*, 03.

Pham, M., Greaney, K. C., & Abel, L. (2020). California community colleges produce positive employment outcomes: Results from the career technical education outcomes survey. *Community College Journal of Research and Practice*, *44*(1), 52–60. https://doi.org/10.1080/10668926.2019.1650843

Plains Middle School. (2022). Retrieved October 3, 2023 from https://www.dpsnc.net/domain/784

Plover High School. (2022). Retrieved October 26, 2023, from https://www.wsfcs.k12.nc.us/Page/3006

Plucker, J. A., & Callahan, C. M. (2020). The evidence base for advanced learning programs. *Phi Delta Kappan*, 102(4), 14–21. https://doi.org/10.1177/0031721720978056

Pluviose, D. (2008). Learning while undocumented: North carolina community college students are caught in the cross hairs of illegal immigration opponents. *Diverse Issues in Higher Education*, *25*(17), 26.

Queirós, M. (2016). Edward soja: Geographical imaginations from the margins to the core. *Planning Theory & Practice*, *17*(1), 154–160. https://doi.org/10.1080/14649357.2015.1130447

Racial and Ethnic Categories and Definitions for NIH Diversity Programs and for Other Reporting Purposes (2015). *National Institutes of Health Notice Number*: NOT-OD-15-089. Retrieved February 6, 2022 from https://grants.nih.gov/grants/guide/notice-files/not-od-15-089.html

317

Raz, M. (2013). *What's wrong with the poor?: Psychiatry, race, and the war on poverty* (Ser. Studies in social medicine). University of North Carolina Press. Retrieved December 2, 2023, from https://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/uncg/detail.action?docID=1663513

Reedbush High School. (2022). Retrieved October 25, 2023, from https://www.gcsnc.com/western_guilford_high

Richards, T., & Richards, L. (1994). Using computers in qualitative research. In N. K. Denzin, & Y.S. Lincoln (Eds.). *Handbook of qualitative research* (pp. 445-462). Sage Publications.

Robin, W., Tracey, S., & Janet, B. (2021). Effect of the advancement via individual determination (avid) program on middle level students' executive function. *Research in Middle Level Education*, *44*(8), 1–10. https://doi.org/10.1080/19404476.2021.1972203

Rockinson-Szapkiw, A., Herring Watson, J., Gishbaugher, J., & Wendt, J. L. (2021). A case for a virtual stem peer-mentoring experience for racial and ethnic minority women mentees. *International Journal of Mentoring and Coaching in Education*, *10*(3), 267–283. https://doi.org/10.1108/IJMCE-08-2020-0053

Rodriguez, A., & McGuire, K. M. (2019). More classes, more access? understanding the effects of course offerings on black-white gaps in advanced placement course-taking. *Review of Higher Education*, 42(2), 641–679. https://doi.org/10.1353/rhe.2019.0010

Rose, G. (2016). *Visual methodologies: An introduction to researching with visual materials* (4th ed.). SAGE Publications.

Rose, R. A., Woolley, M. E., & Bowen, G. L. (2013). Social capital as a portfolio of resources across multiple microsystems: Implications for middle-school students. *Family relations*, 62(4), 545–558.

Rourke, J., & Boone, E. (2009). Withrow university high school: every student college

    bound. *Principal Leadership*, 9(10), 44–47.

Rousseau Anderson, C., & Cross, B.E. (2022). A call to "do justice": A crt analysis of urban

    teacher preparation. In M. Lynn, & A.D. Dixon (Eds.). *Handbook of Critical Race*

    Theory in Education (2nd ed., pp. 355-363). Routledge. Retrieved November 12, 2023,

    from https://doi-org.libproxy.uncg.edu/10.4324/9781351032223

Royster, P., Gross, J., & Hochbein, C. (2015). Timing is everything: getting students back on

    track to college readiness in high school. *The High School Journal*, *98*(3), 208–225.

Saldaña Johnny. (2009. *The coding manual for qualitative researchers*. Sage.

Saltman, K.J. (2009). Corporatization and the control of schools. In M.W. Apple, W. Au, &

    G.L. Armando (Eds.). *The routledge international handbook of critical*

    education (pp. 51-63). Routledge.

Sanders, M. (2010). Hope, opportunity, and access: The in-state tuition debate in north

    carolina. *Journal of Latinos and Education*, *9*(2), 108–125.

Sandhills High School. (2022). Retrieved October 25, 2023, from

    https://www.wsfcs.k12.nc.us/Page/19650

Savage, C. (2004). Military recruiters target schools strategically. *Boston Globe*, A.1, 1.

Schexnider, A. J. (2013). *Saving black colleges: Leading change in a complex organization*.

    Palgrave Macmillan. https://doi.org/10.1057/9781137323460

School Choice in North Carolina. (2024). *EdChoice.* Retrieved March 2, 2024 from

    https://www.edchoice.org/school-choice/state/north-carolina/

Schram, T. (2006). *Conceptualizing and proposing qualitative research*. Merrill Prentice Hall.

Shaw, D. (2014). Rethinking remediation for college students: Using preservice education students in connection with high school ap classes. *New England Reading Association Journal*, 50(1), 38–43.

Shedd, C. (2015). *Unequal city: Race, schools, and perceptions of injustice*. Russell Sage Foundation.

Soja, E. W. (1989). *Postmodern geographies: The reassertion of space in critical social theory* (Ser. Radical thinkers). Verso.

Soja, E. W. (2009). Taking space personally. In B. Warf, & S. Arias, (Eds.). *The spatial turn: Interdisciplinary perspectives* (pp. 11-35). Routledge.

Soja, E. W. (2010). *Seeking spatial justice* (Ser. Globalization and community series). University of Minnesota Press. Retrieved January 19, 2024, from https://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/uncg/detail.action?docID=548072

Solórzano, D.G. & Yosso, T. J. (2002). Critical race methodology: Counter-storytelling as an analytical framework for education research. *Qualitative Inquiry*, *8*(1), 23–44. https://doi.org/10.1177/107780040200800103

Sparks, D., & Malkus, R. (2013). *Statistics in brief: First year undergraduate remedial coursetaking: 1999-2000, 2003-2004, 2007-2008.* National Center for Education Statistics.

Spees, L. P., & Lauen, D. L. (2019). Evaluating charter school achievement growth in north carolina: Differentiated effects among disadvantaged students, stayers, and switchers. *American Journal of Education*, *125*(3), 417–451.

Spring, J. (2018). The american school: From the puritans to the trump era. (10th ed.). Taylor and Francis.

State Board of Education. (2017). Vertical Progression: 2017. Retrieved November 27, 2023 from https://www.dpi.nc.gov/documents/publications/catalog/cm209-ela-vertical-progression/open

Stuckart, D. (2022). How the high-stakes testing and accountability movement undermines educative experiences. In J. Ávila, A.G. Rud, L.J. Waks, & E. Ring, (Eds.). *The contemporary relevance of john dewey's theories on teaching and learning: Deweyan perspectives on standardization, accountability, and assessment in education* (pp. 39-55). Routledge. https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003108146

Summers, R. (2021). A mixed methods exploration of secondary students' attitudes and intentions in relation to elective science course enrollment. *School Science and Mathematics*, 121(7), 395–407. https://doi.org/10.1111/ssm.12495

Superville, D. R. (2016). San diego strives to close gap in access to advanced courses. *Education Week*, 35(27).

Tayaben, J. (2014). Undertaking as a concrete enquiry: A review of penny tinkler's using photographs in social and historical research. *The Qualitative Report*, *19*(2), 1–3.

Tennetville High School. (2023). Retrieved October 19, 2023, from https://www.queensgranthigh.org/

Terraville Middle School. (2022). Retrieved October 15, 2023, from https://www.wsfcs.k12.nc.us/hanesms

Testa, A., & Jackson, D. B. (2019). Food insecurity, food deserts, and waist-to-height ratio: Variation by sex and race/ethnicity. *Journal of Community Health: The Publication for Health Promotion and Disease Prevention*, *44*(3), 444–450. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10900-018-00601-w

Theoharis, G. (2008). "At every turn": The resistance that principals face in their pursuit of

    equity and justice. *Journal of School Leadership*, *18*(3), 303–343.

    https://doi.org/10.1177/105268460801800304

Theoharis, G. (2009). *The school leaders our children deserve: seven keys to equity, social*

    justice, and school reform. Teachers College Press.

Thirtle, M. R. (2001). Educational benefits and officer-commissioning opportunities available to

    u.s. military servicemembers. *Office of the Secretary of Defense, United States.*

    Department of Defense. Rand. Retrieved March 1, 2024 from

    https://www.rand.org/pubs/monograph_reports/MR981.html

Thrift, N. (2007). Overcome by space: Reworking foucault. In J. Crampton, & S. Elden, (Eds.).

    Space, knowledge and power: Foucault and geography (pp. 53-58). Ashgate.

Tinkler, P. (2014). *Using photographs in social and historical research*. SAGE Publications Ltd

    https://dx.doi.org/10.4135/9781446288016

Transportation Department: Modes of Transportation. (2022). *Choice Schools and Programs.*

    Retrieved March 2, 2024 from https://www.gcsnc.com/Page/11407

Trounstine, J. (2018). *Segregation by design: Local politics and inequality in american cities*.

    Cambridge University Press. Retrieved December 5, 2023, from https://www-cambridge-

    org.libproxy.uncg.edu/core/books/segregation-by-

    design/9CEF629688C0C684EDC387407F5878F2.

Tyson, K. (2011). *Integration interrupted: Tracking, black students, and acting white after*

    brown. Oxford University Press.

United States Commission on Civil Rights. (2010). *Encouraging minority students to pursue*

    science, technology, engineering, and math careers: A briefing before the united states

commission on civil rights, held in washington, dc. U.S. Commission on Civil Rights. Retrieved April 22, 2022, from https://heinonlineorg.libproxy.uncg.edu/HOL-/Page?handle=hein.civil/uscdfi0001&id=13&collection=civil&index=

Venkatraman, S., & Kaspi, S. (2018). Improving employment outcomes of career and technical education students. *Higher Education, Skills and Work - Based Learning*, *8*(4), 469–483. https://doi.org/10.1108/HESWBL-01-2018-0003

Vetter Middle School. (n.d.). Retrieved October 18, 2023, from https://www.cmsk12.org/eastwayMS

Wai, J., & Worrell, F. C. (2020). How talented low-income kids are left behind. *Phi Delta Kappan*, 102(4), 26-29. https://doi-org.libproxy.uncg.edu/10.1177/0031721720978058

Walter M. Williams High School (2023). Retrieved November 11, 2023 from https://www.waltermwilliams78.com/class_custom8.cfm

Warf, B., & Arias, S. (2009). Introduction: The reinsertion of space in the humanities and social sciences. *The spatial turn: interdisciplinary perspectives*. Routledge.

Washington, A.R., (2010). Professional school counselors and african american males: Using school/community collaboration to enhance academic performance. *Journal of African American Males in Education 1*(1), 26–39. Retrieved December 5, 2023, from https://www.proquest.com/docview/2666975679?accountid=14604&sourcetype=Scholarly%20Journals

Washington High School. (2022). Retrieved October 10, 2023 from https://www.ccs.k12.nc.us/domain/4161

Watson, R. (1997). Ethnomethodology and textual analysis. In D. Silverman (Ed.). *Qualitative research: Theory, method, and practice* (pp. 80-98). Sage Publications.

Way, L. B., & Patten, R. (2013). *Hunting for "dirtbags": why cops over-police the poor and racial minorities*. Northeastern University Press. Retrieved December 2, 2023, from https://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/uncg/detail.action?docID=1093565

Weber, S. (2008). Visual images in research. In J.G. Knowles and A.L. Cole (Eds.). *Handbook of the arts in qualitative research: Perspective, methodologies, examples, and issues* (pp. 41-54). Sage.

Weaver, A., & Osterman, P. (2017). Skill demands and mismatch in u.s. manufacturing. *Industrial & Labor Relations Review*, *70*(2), 275–307. https://doi.org/10.1177/0019793916660067

Welton Anjalé D, & Martinez, M. A. (2014). Coloring the college pathway: A more culturally responsive approach to college readiness and access for students of color in secondary schools. *The Urban Review: Issues and Ideas in Public Education*, *46*(2), 224–224. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11256-014-0283-8

Wertz, F. J., & Wertz, F. J. (2011). *Five ways of doing qualitative analysis: Phenomenological psychology, grounded theory, discourse analysis, narrative research, and intuitive inquiry*. Guilford Press.

Western High School. (2022). Retrieved October 20, 2023, from https://www.gcsnc.com/Page/19

Weston Elementary School, (2022). Retrieved October 12, 2023 from https://www.duplinschools.net/bes

Wilkins, J., & Bost, L. W. (2016). Dropout prevention in middle and high schools: From research to practice. *Intervention in School and Clinic*, 51(5), 267–275. *https://doi.org/10.1177/1053451215606697*

Wilson, E. (2021) Confronting "white island" school districts. *Poverty & Race Journal*, 30(3) Oct-Dec 2021), 11-12. Retrieved December 5, 2023, from

https://uncg.on.worldcat.org/oclc/9385385980

Wolcott, H. F. (1994). *Transforming qualitative data: Description, analysis, and interpretation*. Sage Publications.

Woodburn Arts Magnet, (2022). Retrieved September 23, 2023, from

https://www.gcsnc.com/domain/321

Wright Hills Middle School. (2022). Retrieved October 22, 2023, from

https://www.gcsnc.com/Page/211

Wu, M., Cheng, H., Shah, S., & Rich, R. (2014). Career challenges and opportunities in the global chemistry enterprise. In H. Cheng, S. Shah, & M. Wu. (Eds.). *Careers, entrepreneurship, and diversity: Challenges and opportunities in the global chemistry enterprise* (pp. 1-28). American Chemical Society. Retrieved April 22, 2022, from

https://pubs-acs-org.libproxy.uncg.edu/doi/pdf/10.1021/bk-2014-1169.ch001

Wu-Rorrer, R. (2017). Filling the gap: Integrating stem into career and technical education middle school programs. *Technology and Engineering Teacher*, *77*(2), 8–15.

Wyner, J. S. (2014). *What excellent community colleges do: Preparing all students for success*. Harvard Education Press.

Yosso, T.J. (2006). *Critical race stories across the chicana/chicano pipeline*. Taylor & Francis.

Zamudio, M., Russell, C., Rios, F., & Bridgeman, J. L. (2010). *Critical race theory matters: Education and ideology*. Taylor & Francis. Retrieved December 4, 2023, from

https://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/uncg/reader.action?docID=592906.

Zasloff, B., & Steckel, J. (2014). *Hold fast to dreams: A college guidance counselor, his students, and the vision of a life beyond poverty*. New York University Press. Retrieved January 27, 2024 from

https://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/uncg/reader.action?docID=1486510

Zeimer, S. (2020). Exclusionary zoning, school segregation, and housing segregation: An investigation into a modern desegregation case and solutions to housing segregation. (people ex rel. becerra v. sausalito marin city school district). *Hastings Constitutional Law Quarterly*, *48*(1), 205–229.

Zhang, J., Yuen, M., & Chen, G. (2018). Teacher support for career development: An integrative review and research agenda. *Career Development International*, 23(2), 122–144. *https://doi.org/10.1108/CDI-09-2016-0155*

Recruitment Flyer

<u>UNCG RESEARCH PROJECT</u>

My name is Patrick Preudhomme, and I am a PhD candidate at the University of North Carolina at Greensboro. I am currently completing the graduation requirements for the Education Leadership and Cultural Foundations PhD program. This research project is investigating the experiences that Latinx, Native American, and African American students have had in North Carolina public schools with regards to College and Career Readiness curriculum. I believe that you would be an ideal participant, and I would like to interview you via Zoom. The interview would last between 45 minutes to an hour, and I will compensate you for your time with a $25 gift card of your choice (Amazon, Visa, Target, etc.) for each interviewing session. Ideally, you will participate in at least two, and possibly three data gathering sessions.

All information from the interviews will be kept confidential and you will be referred to by a pseudonym so that your identity cannot be discovered. After this research project is completed, the data will be stored for five (5) years per UNCG policy. Once this storage period has elapsed, all the data and recordings will be destroyed to further protect your privacy.

Please contact me at 336.380.5801 (call or text) to schedule a time for your first interview if you are willing to participate in this study. You may also reach me by email at <u>papreudh@uncg.edu</u>.

Thank you for considering this request.

Adult Consent Form for Dissertation Research Activity

Name of student researcher: **Patrick A. Preudhomme Sr.**
Address: **1706 Highview Street, Burlington, NC 27215**
Telephone number: **336.380.5801**
E-mail address: **papreudh@uncg.edu**

Thank you for agreeing to participate in this research activity with the student researcher, a graduate student at The University of North Carolina at Greensboro. This form outlines the purposes of this research activity and provides a description of your involvement and rights as a participant.

The purposes of this research activity are the following:
To gain insight into the following research problem or question:
How are North Carolina's Native American, African American and Latinx students impacted by the state's College and Career Readiness (CCR) curriculum?

You are invited to participate in this study by participating in multiple **one hour Zoom interviews during which you will be asked questions about your secondary school education experiences.**

As the researcher, I agree to meet the following conditions:
1. I will audio record our interview and transcribe the recording for the purpose of accuracy. At the end of the study, the Zoom files will be erased or destroyed.
2. I will assign you a fictitious name on the transcript. Your real name, or the names of places, will not be used at any point of information.
3. The data collected for this research project will be published in the form of a dissertation in partial fulfillment of the requirements for a PhD in Education Leadership and Cultural Foundations at UNCG.

As a participant in this research, you are entitled to know the nature of my research. You are free to decline to participate, and you are free to stop an interview or withdraw from the study at any time. There is no penalty for withdrawing your participation. Feel free to ask any questions at any time about the nature of this research activity and the methods I am using. Your suggestions and concerns are important to me.

Please indicate your willingness to participate in this research process by checking one of the following statements and providing your signature below. The signatures below indicate an acknowledgement of the terms described above.

_____ I wish to participate in the research described above, have read this consent form, and agree to be audio and video recorded during the Zoom interviews.

(SIGNATURE OF RESEARCH PARTICIPANT)	(DATE)
(SIGNATURE OF RESEARCHER)	(DATE)

APPENDIX C: PARTICIPANT RIGHTS DISCLOSURE

Participant Rights Disclosure (Read at beginning of Interview Sessions)

Thank you for agreeing to participate in my dissertation research study which is a requirement for the Education Leadership and Cultural Foundations PhD program in which I am currently enrolled. This study will investigate the experiences that Native American, African American, and Latinx students have had with regards to the North Carolina College and Career Readiness curriculum mandates. In order to protect your privacy, and ensure that your best interests are preserved, I will use pseudonyms in place of your name, and all names (including cities, schools, and individuals) that you provide during the interview. I will be the only individual with access to the transcripts and field notes, and the digital recordings will be stored in an encrypted digital "box" provided by the University of North Carolina at Greensboro (UNCG). After successful completion of the course, all digital records will be destroyed.

During our interview it is possible that you might experience discomfort because of uncomfortable memories of past events. You have the right to end the interview at any time and your withdrawal from participation in this research project will not lead to any negative repercussions from either myself, my peers, or any parties or offices associated with UNCG. You will be provided with a digital copy of the final research paper, upon your request, if you are interested in seeing what the final product looks like. The data in this research project only be used in the dissertation that is being completed as a requirement for graduation. If you have any questions or concerns, please call me at 336.380.5801, or email me at papreudh@uncg.edu. I appreciate your willingness to share your experiences with me during this research project and I am hopeful that you will find the experience meaningful.

APPENDIX D: FIRST ROUND INDIVIDUAL INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

First Round Individual Interview Questions

Prior to beginning the interview introductions will be conducted and the Participant Rights Disclosure (Appendix C) will be read out loud.

<u>**Questions:**</u>

Preliminary Census:
Please tell me about the middle school(s) and high school(s) that you attended for secondary schooling in North Carolina. What were the names and locations of these schools and in what year did you graduate from high school? What is the highest level of schooling that you completed? Any college attendance?

1. Thinking back to your secondary school education, can you recall classes or activities which have positively impacted your life as an adult?

2. Which classes did you take in middle school or high school which encouraged you to consider attending college?

3. How did some of your secondary school courses influence your career choices or career success?

4. Thinking about particular courses, such as ELA or Math, how did your curriculum prepare you for your life as an adult?

5. What additional courses, which were part of your curriculum/track were beneficial for your college or working life?

6. How was your secondary education track/curriculum selected? Was it chosen for you? Did you select your own track/curriculum?

7. How do you feel about the level of preparation for college or work life that your secondary schools provided for you? Was it adequate for your success?

8. Can you recall any uncomfortable experiences during your secondary schooling where you felt that your race or ethnicity disadvantaged you or caused you to be treated differently than other students?

9. When you reflect upon your secondary school coursework, can you think of any courses which were not offered in your track/curriculum which might have helped you with college or career success?

10. Given that I am interested in exploring the effect that North Carolina's College and Career Readiness curriculum framework has had upon the lives of African American and Latinx students, is there any additional information or stories that you would like to share with me?

APPENDIX E: SECOND ROUND INDIVIDUAL INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Second Round Individual Interview Questions

Prior to beginning the interview introductions will be conducted and the Participant Rights Disclosure (Appendix C) will be read out loud.

<u>Questions:</u>

1. Since we last spoke, what additional insights have you had with respect to College and Career Readiness? Has anything happened that impacts your views about curriculum in secondary schools in North Carolina?

Photographs of Participants' Schools Provided to Them in Zoom Chat

2. What words came to mind when you first saw the pictures of the secondary schools which you attended in the PDF file that I provided?

3. Looking at these pictures, how did the physical attributes of your schools facilitate your learning, and how did the buildings' designs and features contribute to your personal College and Career Readiness?

4. Are there any people or anecdotal stories that come to mind when looking at your former schools?

5. How well did your school buildings reflect the culture or character of the community in which they were situated, and in what manner did this contribute to College and Career Readiness goals?

6. As you think about your secondary schools, and the communities in which they were situated, what changes do you believe would be beneficial for College and Career preparation for future students? What resources might be necessary to carry out these changes?

7. When you reflect upon the school personnel and their specialized roles, which staff (teachers, counselors, administrators, etc.) as a group were most impactful with regards to your personal College and Career Readiness? Why?

8. If you were a North Carolina policymaker, who was trying to improve College and Career Readiness delivery in secondary schools, what would be your top five goals?

9. Given your experiences with College and Career Readiness curriculum in North Carolina, do you believe that schools should continue to promote this framework? Why or why not?

10. What structural changes in North Carolina secondary schooling do you believe might most improve the lives of students of color? Should curriculum be a primary focus or are there other domains of schooling which might be more impactful? Why?

APPENDIX F: FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Focus Group Discussion Questions

Prior to beginning the Focus Group discussion, the ground rules (Appendix G) will be verbally presented.

Discussion Questions:

1. Do any of you believe that the College and Career Readiness curriculum framework has been beneficial for your adult lives? Please provide specific examples.

2. Reflecting back to your secondary schooling, was there a pivotal year when you felt the impetus to pursue a college education? What factors contributed to this?

3. How does the "Nature versus Nurture" debate play into North Carolina's adaptation of the College and Career Readiness curriculum framework?

4. Given your experiences in North Carolina's secondary schools, do you feel that the College and Career Readiness curriculum is equitably delivered to all students?

5. What education policy changes do you believe would be most beneficial for students of color in North Carolina's secondary schools? Does curriculum need to be changed or are there other aspects of the educational system which need reform?

"Thank you for your time and insightful comments."

APPENDIX G: FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSION GROUND RULES

Focus Group Discussion Ground Rules

1. All Focus Group participants will use their assigned pseudonym as their screen name to safeguard their identities.

2. All Focus Group participants will keep their videos off and will remain unmuted during the discussion. While this might lead to some instances of overlapping speech, it will promote spontaneous conversations while also safeguarding individual identities.

3. Participants will be respectful of other individuals' expressed viewpoints and will not critique them. Instead, they will express contradictory viewpoints as alternative explanations for the questions being discussed. ("And" as opposed to "But")

4. Participants will engage in the conversations in a genuine fashion with a willingness to listen and learn from the ideas of others.

5. The researcher will refrain from steering the conversations and will only act as a facilitator by providing the questions that guide the discussions and maintaining continuity of conversations.

6. The Focus Group session will last no longer than 60 minutes and the researcher will provide a five-minute warning at the 55:00 minute mark.

Glossary of Acronyms

ABR	Arts Based Research
ACT	American College Test
AG	Academically Gifted
AI	Artificial Intelligence
AIG	Academically and Intellectually Gifted
AP	Advanced Placement
ASVAB	Armed Services Vocational Aptitude Battery
AVID	Advancement Via Individual Determination
AYP	Adequate Yearly Progress
CCP	College and Career Promise
CCR	College and Career Readiness
CCS	Common Core Standards
CFNC	College Foundation of North Carolina
CNA	Certified Nursing Assistant
CPI	Cumulative Promotion Index
CRT	Critical Race Theory
CTE	Career and Technical Education
EBP	Evidence Based Policy
ECHS	Early College High School
ELA	English Language Arts
ELC	Education Leadership and Cultural Foundations
ELL	English Language Learner
EM	Ethnomethodology
ESEA	Elementary and Secondary Education Act
ESL	English as a Second Language
ESSA	Every Student Succeeds Act
FAFSA	Free Application for Federal Student Aid
GPA	Grade Point Average
HB	House Bill
HBCU	Historically Black Colleges and Universities
HIS	Hispanic Serving Institution
HOSA	Health Occupations Students of America
HVAC	Heating Ventilation and Air Conditioning
IEP	Individualized Education Plan
IRB	Institutional Review Board
IT	Information Technology
JROTC	Junior Reserve Officer Training Corps
LEA	Local Educational Agency
LGBTQ	Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender and Queer
LPN	Licensed Practical Nurse
MTSS	Multi-Tiered Systems of Supports

NACE	National Association of Colleges and Employers
NAF	National Academy of Finance
N/A/L	Native American, African American, and Latinx
NASA	National Aeronautics and Space Administration
NBRS	National Blue Ribbon School
NC A&T	North Carolina Agricultural and Technical State University
NCCCS	North Carolina Community College System
NCDPI	North Carolina Department of Public Instruction
NCLB	No Child Left Behind
NCSCOS	North Carolina Standard Course of Study
NFL	National Forensics League
PEP	Personal Education Plan
PhD	Doctor of Philosophy
PSAT	Preliminary Scholastic Assessment Test
QDAS	Qualitative Data Analysis Software
ROTC	Reserve Officer Training Corps
RTT	Race to the Top
SAT	Scholastic Assessment Test
SBA	Standards Based Accountability
SLNC	State Library of North Carolina
STEM	Science Technology Engineering and Math
TSU	Thompson State University
UNC	University of North Carolina
UNCG	University of North Carolina Greensboro