

THE INFLUENCE OF HOME AND SCHOOL ON RESILIENCE: A PHENOMENOLOGICAL  
STUDY OF URBAN, AT-RISK, HIGH ACHIEVING STUDENTS

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## **ABSTRACT**

### **THE INFLUENCE OF HOME AND SCHOOL ON RESILIENCE: A PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY OF URBAN, AT-RISK, HIGH ACHIEVING STUDENTS**

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For years, researchers, practitioners, legislators, parents, social workers, and community activists among others have toiled with the underachievement of urban students compared with their counterparts. It is well documented in the literature the high-risk environments to which urban students are exposed that lead to destructive behaviors, habits, and outcomes. This phenomenon of the urban student, both as it relates to environment and achievement, can be traced as far back as the 1960's when discussions and studies at the policy level, motivated the development of terms such as at-risk and policies that provided additional funding (Title I) for students qualifying under such labels. As the problem persisted through accountability legislation, choice, and state takeovers, many researchers began searching for pockets of success among the high percentages of low test scores and dropout rates. It is this space where theorists began to uncover the resilience of the urban student. This study looks at factors in the home and school that influences resilience in the urban, at-risk, high-achieving student. In a qualitative format, thematic analysis will be used to organize the findings into themes. As a result of the study, practitioners and parents will be able to implement systemic strategies that support resilience both in the home and school.

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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF TABLES .....	viii
LIST OF FIGURES.....	ix
CHAPTER I. BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY .....	1
Purpose of Study .....	2
Research Question .....	5
Definition of Terms .....	5
Urban Schools.....	6
Definition of Resilience.....	7
Resilience and Urban Schools.....	9
Limitations .....	10
Contribution to the Field .....	10
Overview of the Study .....	11
CHAPTER II. REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE .....	13
Section I: Resilience Theory .....	13
Origins of Resilience .....	13
Resilience and Environmental Factors .....	13
Resilience and Protective Factors .....	14
Resilience and Risk Factors.....	16
Resilience and Race .....	18
Section II: Human Development Theory .....	20
Phenomenology and Ecological Systems Theory.....	23
Section III: Social Cognitive Theory .....	25
Section IV: School Effectiveness Theory .....	27
Conceptual Framework .....	30
CHAPTER III. METHODOLOGY .....	34
Research Methodology .....	34
Qualitative Research .....	34
Phenomenological Research Design .....	35
Challenges of Phenomenological Research .....	37
Assumptions of Phenomenological Research .....	37
Data Collection.....	37
Interviews .....	38
Informal Interviews .....	39
Site.....	39
Sample.....	40
Data Analysis .....	41
Member Checking .....	42

Challenges with Member Checking .....	42
Role of the Researcher .....	43
CHAPTER IV. DATA ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS.....	44
Introduction of Student Participants.....	46
Leslie.....	46
Michael.....	46
Janet.....	46
David.....	47
Tiffany.....	47
Section 2: Themes and Student Responses.....	49
Theme 1: Self-Awareness.....	49
Self-awareness and interpretation.....	52
Personal experiences that inform self-awareness.....	56
Theme 2: Adult advocacy and expectations.....	57
Adult advocacy and influence.....	61
Network of social supports.....	66
Theme 3: Parent and family influence.....	67
Parental influence and reinforcement.....	70
Trust development and meaning making.....	75
Theme 4: Peer Influence.....	76
Peer social support and influence.....	79
Peer influences and behavior.....	85
Theme 5: Self-Efficacy.....	86
Self-efficacy and meaning making.....	88
Developing coping responses.....	92
Section 3: Professional Staff Observations.....	93
Teacher observations.....	93
Counselor observations.....	99
Security observations.....	102
Data Analysis Summary.....	103
Self-Awareness.....	103
Parental Influence.....	104
Peer Social Support.....	104
Adult Advocacy and Expectations.....	105
Self-Efficacy.....	106
CHAPTER V. DISCUSSIONS AND CONCLUSIONS.....	108
Summary.....	108
Limitations.....	113
Relationship between Findings and Previous Research.....	113
Implications for Practice for School Leaders.....	116
Implications for Future Research.....	118
Conclusion.....	119

APPENDICES	
Appendix A Table 8: State of Michigan 31a at-risk criteria.....	122
Appendix B Student Participant Interview Questionnaire.....	123
Appendix C Professional Participant Interview Questionnaire.....	124
Appendix D Table 9: A.C.T. site averages and state averages.....	125
Appendix E Parent and Student Consent Form.....	126
Appendix F Professional Participant Consent Form.....	129
BIBLIOGRAPHY.....	132

## LIST OF TABLES

Table 1: Erikson's Stages of Psychosocial Theory . . . . .	21
Table 2: Student participant background summary.....	48
Table 3: Theme 1 self-awareness codes, code meaning units, theoretical foundation for meanings, sub-themes and themes.....	55
Table 4: Theme 2 adult advocacy codes, code meaning units, theoretical foundation for meanings, sub-themes and themes.....	65
Table 5: Theme 3 parental influence codes, code meaning units, theoretical foundation for meanings, sub-themes and themes.....	74
Table 6: Theme 4 peer social support codes, code meaning units, theoretical foundation for meanings, sub-themes and themes.....	84
Table 7: Theme 5 self-efficacy codes, code meaning units, theoretical foundation for meanings, sub-themes and themes.....	91
Table 8: State of Michigan 31a at-risk criteria.....	122
Table 9: A.C.T. site averages and state averages .....	125



## LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1: Conceptual Model.....	112
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## **CHAPTER I. BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY**

“How is it that you were able to navigate your way through a challenging environment like the eastside of Saginaw avoiding drug activity, gang activity, premature drinking and drug abuse to go on to be a successful collegiate student athlete, and a High School Principal? There are a significant number of kids just like you who are able to successfully maneuver through the urban environment, achieve well in school and ultimately go on to accomplish their goals in life?

What is it about kids like you and others? What is it that exists either internally and/or externally that these kids draw upon to achieve and maintain success at varying levels of their development? This is what you need to zero in on.”

These were the words of my high school basketball coach as we discussed a possible topic to explore for a dissertation. After he made that statement, it occurred to me that coach had done it again. Just as he would do when I was in high school struggling with a decision, his wisdom would guide me in the right direction. This time, he guided me towards an intriguing topic that he knew I would be passionate about. In the midst of overwhelming amounts of underachievement in urban schools, constant political attacks, ineffective legislation such as No Child Left Behind, and misleading media reports, it becomes natural to gravitate to areas of success in an effort to ascertain effective and sustainable solutions. Thus, my personal experiences have led me to study resilience in at-risk, urban, high-achieving students. In my current position as a High School Principal in an urban setting, it is imperative for me to explore factors that lead to academic success for at-risk urban students both at home and in school. Thereby, creating a theoretical framework from which I can draw upon to inform my work as a school administrator.

## **Purpose of the Study**

Historically, students in urban educational settings have experienced significant achievement gaps, specifically in math and reading, when compared to their counterparts. According to the NAEP (2007) executive summary, scores rose in all categories for all groups on assessments; however, whites scored an average of 26 points higher than blacks on all assessments (p. 2). Urban students have posted dismal achievement rates, low graduation rates, and disproportionate suspensions and expulsions according to the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES, 2000, p. 4). As evidenced by the executive summary, NCES (2000) concluded that students attending urban schools were more likely than their suburban counterparts to:

- Live in poverty
- Be exposed to health risks
- Experience economic insecurity and instability
- Change schools
- Come from single parent households
- Have parents with no college education

In addition, NCES (2000) studies revealed that urban students experienced the following in school:

- Lower scores on achievement tests
- Not completing High School on time
- Higher rates of poverty and unemployment 7-15 years after high school
- Excessively high absenteeism rates
- Excessively high discipline rates
- High teen pregnancy rates
- Lower teacher quality

In educational reform movements in this country, numerous attempts have been made to address these disparities between urban and suburban students. Among these studies in the 1960's *The Coleman Report* (1966), and more recently *A Nation at Risk* (1983), *the National Educational Longitudinal Study of 1988*, and 2008 with a follow up study conducted by the U.S. Department of Education entitled *A Nation Accountable* (2010). According to the Program for International Student Assessment (PISA, 2009, p. 8), the United States ranked 21<sup>st</sup> in science, 24<sup>th</sup> in math, and 17<sup>th</sup> in reading when compared to other industrialized nations (PISA, 2009). As the landmark study, *A Nation at Risk* (1983) suggested, not only does the United States educational system face a crisis among its urban students, there is also evidence that the United States' educational system is not competitive internationally relative to high expectations, discipline, and necessary support systems (p. 3). Perhaps these federally commissioned studies have sparked even more attention to the crisis of urban education and motivated a political whirlwind that has resulted in revising the current and latest of national educational reform movements, No Child Left behind (NCLB) (2000), under the umbrella of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (1965). However, after twelve years of the passing of NCLB (2000), the achievement gap still remains significant as evidenced by the Educational Testing Services analysis achievement gap. (ETS, 2010, p. 7). While there have been many reforms that have attempted to address the elusive gap, few have yielded the necessary results to impact the large disparities that exist between urban students and students in other demographic areas.

In *Schooling in Capitalist America: Educational Reform and the Contradictions of Economic Life*, economists Samuel Bowles and Herbert Gintis, wrote a groundbreaking book suggesting that schools reproduce existing inequalities, therefore, rejecting any notion that equal opportunities existed for all through education (Bowles & Gintis, 1976). Furthermore, Bowles

and Gintis posit that schools reflect the dominant culture of America; therefore, urban students attending schools in urban areas synonymous with lower socioeconomic statuses should not achieve at the levels of schools in areas where the socioeconomic status has been traditionally higher (Bowles & Gintis, 1976). Could the analysis of these Bowles and Gintis be correct? Could the problem be centered in the structure of the educational and economic structures of the United States?

The persistence of the achievement gap and the failure of years of reforms and commissioned studies to produce viable answers that ignite effective solutions certainly cause one to ponder those possibilities. However, in the midst of these campaigns to reduce the achievement gap, there are students labeled at-risk that exist in urban school settings, who have been able to resist many of the stereotypical downfalls that have plagued the urban student, thereby, beating the atypical odds and achieving academic success. The purpose of this study is to explore the influence of the home and school on developing enhancing and/or impeding resilience factors present in the high-achieving, at-risk, urban student. This study will look at those factors in students who have varying ethnic backgrounds as opposed to specifically African-American or Latino/a. In the past, the primary literature on urban schools is clear in identifying urban school environments as those that include high volumes of high-risk behaviors that lead to unsuccessful school and adult outcomes. Therefore, this study looked at resilience, its characteristics and its origins of students who are able to achieve at high levels academically in these limiting environments.

## **Research Question**

In order to gain a clear understanding of the influence of home and school on these high achieving students, I asked the following question:

Are there factors in the home and school that contribute to resilience in at-risk, urban, high-achieving students?

## **Definition of Terms**

Foundational to this study are several terms that need to be defined in an effort to provide clarity and understanding. First, achievement gap is defined in the literature as the difference in test score performance between usually, white students and African-American and Latino/a student's (Noguera & Wing, 2006). Secondly, high-achieving is defined as students that have selected to take advanced placement and/or honors courses and maintained a cumulative G.P.A. of 3.0. In addition, for the purposes of this study the definition of high achieving will also include students who attain an above average school score on the A.C.T. standardized test as this is one of the primary determinants in the school.

Thirdly, the definition of at-risk is taken directly from the State of Michigan's section 31a program for eligibility criteria of at-risk pupils, which states students must meet at least two of the following criteria to be considered at-risk (Michigan MDE, 2013):

- Victim of child abuse or neglect
- Below grade level in English Language Arts, and Communication Skills, Mathematics, Science, or Social Studies
- Pregnant teenager or teenage parent
- Eligible for free or reduced-price lunch
- Atypical behavior or attendance patterns

- Family history of school failure, incarceration, or substance abuse

In this study, each student selected qualified under the free and reduced lunch and family history of school failure criteria. However, it is also important to note many of the theoretical implications that accompany the term at-risk. Although for the purpose of this study, a streamlined definition of at-risk is used based upon state eligibility criteria, the term at-risk itself is loaded with assumptions motivating the expectation that some type of intervention is necessary to avoid destruction of a students' life. At-risk has been a label that has been used historically to categorize a group of students based upon circumstances that are often times not in the students' control. Furthermore, as chapter II of this study will detail, a portion of the literature has found that often what has been perceived to be a condition that places a kid at-risk, in reality becomes a motivational tool for success. This term has been prevalent in the literature increasing the danger of responding incorrectly and ineffectively to students who have been assigned this label. A growing amount of recent literature serves to deconstruct the term and notion at-risk, thus, changing the focus and discussion to understanding the promise and potential of these students. To that end, this paper is an effort to contribute to the understanding of these students, which will inform a comprehensive process for programming, both inside and outside the school setting, and serving to increase resilient behavior from these students.

**Urban Schools.** First, urban schools are defined as schools typically with locales in the central city, that serve large concentrations of minority students and students that come from low socioeconomic status (SES) households. The site for this study is a school that meets that criteria. While the site of this study is an urban school, it is essential to mention the implications that attending an urban school has on the urban, at-risk student. Numerous reports and studies of urban schools, particularly those done by the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES), have

bolstered the belief that urban schools are inferior. This belief is fed by the constant reporting to the public of sub-par standardized testing scores, decaying buildings, high incidences of violence, unqualified teachers, less than challenging curriculums and inadequate resources. It is important to note that due to the nature of urban schools, and the fact that they serve large concentrations of low socioeconomic status students, there is also a large volume of high risk activities associated with attending urban schools. Such as, premature dropout rates, violence, teen pregnancy, and drug and alcohol abuse. However, one of the main components of resilience, is the ability to repel many of the temptations of the high-risk environment, to achieve above-average success. Therefore, identifying the factors in the school that contribute to or impede resilience, will assist in supporting the urban, at-risk high achieving student.

**Definition of Resilience.** Resilience is a term that has been used interchangeably throughout various genres of literature. It has been analyzed in social science theory to determine its role in larger social structures such as, social ecological systems as well as in smaller contexts such as home environments. In addition, resilience has been heavily analyzed in child sexual and emotional abuse contexts in an effort to determine the contributors to the success of children who are able to navigate themselves through trauma. It has also been prevalent in the mental health field as a quality sought for replication as a tool to increase good mental health. There is no sound definition of resilience that exists across the varying theoretical genres; however, in this study it is defined as a set of qualities that fosters a process of successful adaptation and transformation despite risk and adversity. Also, resilience includes the abilities to form relationships, problem solve, develop a sense of identity and to plan and hope (Benard, 1997).

Throughout the literature, there are numerous descriptions and depictions of resilience. In early literature on resilience, theorists explained that the term was initially utilized to describe



invulnerability, invincibility, or hardiness due to the struggle associated with becoming resilient (Wolin & Wolin, 1993). The term has also been described as a protective mechanism that modifies an individual's response to risk (Rutter, 1981). In a separate publication, Rutter (1981) defines resilience as a positive role of individual differences in people's response to stress and adversity. Due to the varying nature by which to analyze resilience, there have been equally varying ways to describe or define it as it relates to the at-risk student. Researchers such as Wang, Haertel, and Walberg (1997) define resilience as "the likelihood of success in school despite environmental adversities" (p. 46). It has also been categorized into different types. For example, much of the literature centered on what researchers identified as educational resilience; that is, analyzing resilience within the context of the home and school environment as it relates to achievement.

However, as Rutter (1981) states, "If circumstances change, resilience alters" (p. 327). Therefore, definitions of resilience have also relied on environmental characteristics that help to develop factors that lead to or prohibit this phenomenon. Resilience has been divided into the categories of risk factors and protective factors. These factors have been examined not only in the home and school, but in other social contexts as well. Risk factors are identified as variables that increase negative outcomes, thus decreasing resilience. Protective factors are identified as variables that increase positive outcomes, thus increasing resilience. These categories of factors allowed others to examine resilience through the several lenses that included poverty, childhood abuse, family structure, parent educational level, intellectual ability, caring adults, support systems and exposure to alcohol or drug abuse. While there have been various definitions of and descriptions for resilience that can be applied across several contexts, this study will specifically utilize resilience as it is defined by Benard (1997) which states that resilience includes the abilities to form relationships, problem solve, develop a sense of identity and to plan and hope.

**Resilience and urban schools.** It is an assumption that resilience exists in urban students due to the high-risk characteristics that urban environments present. Given those characteristics, the prevailing thought is that students who are able to sustain that environment and attain some measure of academic success must possess some level of resilience. However, based on this assumption, this study forced me to ask the question; does resilience exist with white students? In a study on resilience predictions across ethnicity and gender, researchers Wasonga, Christman, and Kilmer (2003) found that white students had larger networks, more social support and more social interactions. Therefore, although resilience was found to be present, most white students maintained an abundance of protective factors that eliminated the need to develop resilience. To that end, what are the structural issues that necessitate the development of the resilience phenomenon in urban students?

The National Center for Educational Statistics (NCES, 2000) reported that urban students were more likely to live in poverty than students in suburban or rural settings. Eric Jensen's (2009) work on poverty indicated the effects that stressors from an impoverished environment can have on the social and cognitive development of students. These findings suggest that there are structural issues related to poverty that create conditions necessitating the development of resilience. In a study on poverty and resilience, researcher Karen Secombe (2003) suggests that the growing disparity of between income and wealth is a causal factor. More importantly, Secombe's (2003) work proposes that adjusting national economic policies would have a larger impact on our system, thus, lessening the need for resilience. As Bowles and Gintis (1976) posited in the development of the social reproductive theory, the economic and social systems are the foundational contributors to the problems that exist within our educational system. Therefore,

until these critical structural issues that cause the conditions of poverty are addressed, resilience is a phenomenon that will continue to be essential to urban student and urban school success.

### **Limitations**

Several limitations are apparent in this study. First, the inability to gain a deeper view into the home is a major limitation. As the study is structured, the interview with the student is designed to provide the majority of the information relative to factors in the home. Interviewing only the participant rather than a parent, parental figure or sibling would have enhanced the trustworthiness of the study. The second limitation is the inability to gain the perspective of the peer group of students selected for the study. Peers would have been asked to discuss what factors contributed to the students in the study abilities to perform at higher levels. A third limitation is the lack of diversity in the research as it relates to human development theory (HDT). Erikson's (1968) human development theory was performed on a homogenous group of students whose experiences differed vastly from the modern, urban, at-risk student. Spencer's (2006) work on (HDT) provides a closer sample of analyzing development with urban students, however, a more comprehensive literature base would have helped to inform the study. Last of all, the students selected for the sample were initially high-achieving students as evidenced by their grade point averages and standardized test scores. Perhaps a study that includes students that are not performing at high-levels, yet with similar at-risk characteristics, would strengthen trustworthiness as it relates to academic talent. In an overwhelming amount of the literature, academic talent is characterized as a manifestation of resilience rather than a factor.

### **Contribution to the Field**

There are many studies that address high-achieving minority students in predominantly white school settings at either the high school or collegiate level. However, the literature is limited

in exploring high-achieving urban students of varying ethnic minorities that achieve at high levels despite the negative pressures associated with attending urban schools. Therefore, it is the aim of this study to identify characteristics in the homes and schools of high-achieving students that develop, support, and enhance resiliency, thereby encouraging the individual to increase and/or sustain high academic achievement.

### **Overview of the Study**

This study is an attempt to identify characteristics both in the home and school that serve as protective factors for resilience in the at-risk, urban student. The significance of the study lies in the fact that it can provide practitioners a deeper look into characteristics or factors both in the home and school that can serve to support resilience in at-risk students. The aim of this study is to replicate those characteristics in an effort to increase student achievement. This study is unique in that it looks at urban students in urban environments, inclusive of varying ethnic minorities. The study is divided into five chapters.

Chapter II of the study is a review of the literature on the topic. It is organized into four sections. Section 1 covers research and theory in the area of resilience. It explores the topic primarily through work done from the middle school setting through adulthood. Resilience is examined in the contexts of the home and school and a limited portion delves into the community. Section 2 of the literature discusses human development theory. The work of psychologist Erik Erikson (1968) and sociologist Margaret Spencer (2006) is explored to gain an understanding of the theory behind human development both cognitively and emotionally, in an effort to place the characteristics of resilience within the home and school. Section 3 of the literature review delves into social cognitive theory. This section primarily covers the work of sociologist Albert Bandura (1977) as it relates to social cognition and particularly self-efficacy. Finally, section 4 reviews

literature on school effectiveness. This section will analyze what urban schools have done to effectively support urban students with at-risk characteristics to be academically successful.

Chapter III will describe the methodology. A qualitative approach and phenomenological design is used for the gathering of data. The rationale for analyzing data in a phenomenological study is explained as appropriate. Steps for analysis will be detailed and an explanation for how to read and interpret the data will be described. Furthermore, chapter III will explain member checking and how utilizing this technique will add to the validity and accurateness of the study.

Chapter IV is a thorough presentation of the findings. It is organized into five areas. Those areas include, motivating factors/future connections, family involvement, relationships with peers, relationships with adults, and school factors. Each section will provide a detailed analysis of protective factors and risk factors in the respective areas that serve to develop and/or impede resilience in the students.

Chapter V will provide an in-depth look at the important findings that are uncovered from the study. The significance of these findings will also be discussed. In addition, implications for practice will be suggested along with possible topics and/or questions for future research. Concluding remarks detailing the study, its challenges, findings, and implications will end chapter V.

## **CHAPTER II. REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE**

Chapter II is organized into four sections that clearly lays a theoretical foundation for this study. Section I will cover theory to provide adequate information on factors of resilience that motivate students for academic success. Section II will explore human development theory in an attempt to frame resilience in the contexts of home and school. Section III is an analysis of the social cognitive theory and its implications for resilience and the urban student. Section IV delves into effective practices that schools have successfully applied towards producing high-achieving at-risk students, particularly in an urban setting.

### **Section I: Resilience Theory**

**Origins of Resilience Theory.** Resilience is a concept, which began in social science research as the attempt was made to identify why certain people became ill as opposed to others (Garmezy, 1974). Research in resilience grew in the 1980's from work done by Emmy Werner (1986) on youngsters with mentally ill or alcoholic parents. Since the theoretical onset of resilience in the 70's and 80's, much of the research has focused on protective processes that bolster resilience. In my application of the theory to the field of education, I am attempting to uncover in the home or school of at-risk, high achieving urban students the protective factors in the home that develop and support resilience.

**Resilience and Environmental Factors.** Much of the earlier research on resilience focused on problems that centered on 'high-risk' youth, thus, identifying the problem in youth, which often had negative implications for addressing at-risk students (Benard, 1997). This deficit approach to research on resilience and at-risk youth ignited a new stream of studies that focused on positive characteristics existing in the environments of at-risk youth (Rutter, Maughan, Mortimore, Ouston, & Smith, 1979). The growing aspect of the literature on resilience grew with

a myriad of studies that uncovered at-risk students who overcame odds and reversed negative trends associated with high-risk environments (Benard, 1991; Garmezy, 1991; Werner & Smith, 1989; Werner & Smith, 1992). Researchers such as Winfield (1994) began to view resilience through student development, thereby supporting and fostering it through protective processes.

This new direction that occurred in the field has now dominated the literature with most studies looking at processes within contextual systems such as the home, school, and community that support resilience. From this change of direction in the literature, new theories and terms began to emerge that identified factors which existed in those environments enhancing risk factors and those enhancing protective factors (Werner & Smith, 1982; Garmezy & Masten, 1994; Reis, 2004; Reis, Colbert, & Hebert, 2004). Noted researchers in the field began to explore these factors in the various settings in an effort to determine the relative impact on students (Benard, 1991; Wang, 1997). Naturally, as more and more evidence became available relative to risk factors and protective factors in the varying environments of home, school, and community, studies in the area of resilience formed capturing the two factors in an organized format, thus, allowing themes to be produced. Many dissertation studies were developed that utilized categories to depict resilience factors (Celico, 2009; Carideo, 2009; Doucette, 2003; Mitchell-Mcleod, 2002). Protective factors began to be categorized into themes such as internal motivation, positive adult and peer interactions, family involvement, social supports, and self-efficacy. On the other hand, risk factors were categorized into areas such as ethnic background, socioeconomic status, gender, and family structure.

**Resilience and Protective Factors.** Several studies emerged that looked at these varying themes as isolated influences, as well as in combination. There was a growing body of literature positing that supportive relationships, particularly in the home with parents, played a significant

role in the development and enhancement of resilience in at-risk youth. In this area, scholars explored the close relationships with parental figures as a protective factor (Garmezy, 1990; Masten & Coatsworth, 1998; Nettles, Mucherah & Jones, 2000). Additionally, explorations looking at the impact of other adult figures began to take shape in the field, solidifying that adult relationships played a significant role in the resilience development of at-risk students:

Numerous researchers have demonstrated the protective impact of extra familial adult relationships for young people, including other adult relatives, friends' parents, teachers, or adults in health and social service settings, among others (Resnick, 2000, p.158).

Social support as a protective factor in the process of developing resilience also became well documented. Peer and community relationships under the umbrella of social support were more closely analyzed. Wang, Heartel and Walberg (1997), found that at-risk students in communities with strong peer support groups and "integrated networks of social organizations" had a stronger impact on resiliency (p.7). In her work on resilience theory, Benard (1997) asserted that there were three categories that promoted resilience particularly in the area of social support, caring and supportive relationships, positive and high expectations, and opportunities for meaningful participation.

While the work on parental and social support from peers, other adult figures and community members are well documented, internal motivation or internal locus of control as protective factors, are areas where the literature lacked similar depth and variety. In fact, much of the literature that covers internal motivation or locus of control is found in the medical and health fields relative to resilience. In the limited literature available exploring internal factors such as locus of control of the at-risk student, differences were discovered in lower performing at-risk students vs. higher performing students. For instance, most lower-performing students blamed



others and external circumstances for lack of success as opposed to higher performing students who tended to focus the responsibility on themselves (Johnson, 1997; McMillan & Reed, 1993). Although the area of protective factors could be discussed in an entire study, risk factors in the home and school play an important role as it relates to influencing resilience.

**Resilience and Risk Factors.** While the categorical resilience theory on protective factors has proven to be extensive with the exception of internal locus of control, the body of literature reviewing and analyzing risk factors also provides some valuable insight into resilience and the at-risk student. Studies in the area of risk factors have used varying categories to identify and explain risk factors. Theorists such as Horn and Xianglei (1998) used terminology like “lowest socioeconomic quartile” and “held back a grade” (p. 1). While some characterized risk factors as chronic exposure to crime, violence, and drug abuse (Fergus & Zimmerman, 2005), other scholars have come to identify risk factors as traumatic events, such as child abuse and living in single-parent homes (Kumpfer, 1999).

Despite the classification, the various studies and theorists all demonstrate that these risk factors play a significant role in the ability of the at-risk student or child to adapt and ultimately develop and display resilience. However, as noted earlier, this aspect of the literature focuses the discussion on the processes of developing resilience within these high-risk factor environments, thus providing mechanisms of hope rather than despair. Much of the research on risk factors has been done in a combination of the social science, mental health, and educational fields.

Nevertheless, a majority of the work in the educational field has differed in the sense that many of the risk factors have centered on home and school environments rather than the individual or community (McMillan & Reed, 1994). Many of the risk factors associated with the school will be covered in section IV of the literature review on school effectiveness. One of the risk factors

explored in the literature, central to the home, includes socioeconomic status (SES). There have been numerous studies establishing low SES as a predictor of low academic performance (Malecki & Demaray, 2006). Therefore, as the field of resilience evolved, SES has become a critical factor in attempting to determine its impact on resilience. Theorists in this area clearly posit that SES is a significant risk factor for educational failure, thus contributing to the inability of students to develop educational resilience (Schoon, Parsons, & Sacker, 2004). For example, Erik Jensen's (2009) work delves into several critical areas that have a direct impact on urban students' ability to develop resilience. In the book, *Teaching With Poverty in Mind: What Being Poor Does To Kids' Brains and What Schools Can Do About It*, Jensen focuses on the relationship between academic achievement and students with low socioeconomic status SES (2009). According to the Council of Greater City Schools (2010), an advocacy group for urban school systems in the country, urban schools average a 69% free and reduced lunch rate. Therefore, seven out of ten students attending urban schools are considered to be living below the poverty line, which has direct implications for Jensen's (2009) work. Jensen's research contends three critical foundational points;

1. Chronic exposure to poverty causes the brain to physically change in a detrimental manner.
2. Due to the brains' ability to adapt from experiences, it can also change in a positive manner (poor children can experience emotional, social, and academic success).
3. There are certain key factors that are particularly effective in turning around students raised in poverty.

Jensen (2009) highlights that poverty involves four primary factors; social and emotional challenges, acute and chronic stressors, cognitive lags, and health and safety issues (p. 84). Resilient students often perform at higher levels than their classmates. What contributes to this success? McMillan and Reed (2010) have found that resilient students are able to negotiate their

environments at a level that enables successful management of each of these factors. For example, when compared to their counterparts, resilient students often overcome social and emotional challenges, stressors, academic challenges and safety issues through strong internal locus of control and reliance upon adult support systems that exist in the home and/or school.

**Resilience and Race.** Although this study does not focus on race specifically, urban students are comprised of an overwhelming majority of minorities. The literature on race draws its relevance from the notion that the research has shown that variables associated with the experiences of being in a minority group contribute to resilience. Race is a factor that has also been explored in the literature as it relates to resilience. There is a substantial amount of theory analyzing the impact that race has upon students within the context of the social environments, such as the school and community. Pedro Noguera (2003) highlights how African-American males are subjected to lacking access to health care, inadequate nutrition, poverty, inadequate housing, and single-parent households.

Researchers such as Phelps, Taylor, and Gerard (1994) point out that African-American students may have additional risk factors associated with race due to experiences with discrimination-personally, institutionally, politically and occupationally. Additionally, psycho-social scholars emphasize that inequities of race, class, gender and poverty pose diverse threats to African-Americans' mental health (Caldwell-Colbert, Parks & Eshun, 2009). Experiences associated with being African-American or a minority have necessitated the development of resilience. In a study looking at racial socialization, researchers found that African-American racial discrimination experiences were associated with a decrease in academic curiosity, persistence, and grades (Neblett, Philip, Cogburn & Sellers, 2006). Furthermore, Steele (2004) concluded that racial-ethnic group identity influences academic achievement due to the

stereotypes associated with historical achievement levels and minorities. For example, African-Americans have historically been associated with low achievement, while Asians have historically been associated with high achievement. In *Young, Gifted and Black; Promoting High Achievement Among African American Students*, scholars Perry, Steele and Hilliard, (2004) make the case that the social positioning of Black students in a racial construct, is a unique one that places Blacks in situations of overcoming unusual obstacles particularly as it relates to school achievement. In related studies, developmental research determined that students act on racial-stereotype information as early as the age of 6 and internalize it by adolescence (Bigler, Averhart, & Liben, 2003). Prominent researcher John Ogbu (1987) labels it “oppositional identities” (p. 326).

Therefore, many students from racial minority groups begin acting upon racial socialization factors such as low-achievement stereotypes as early as first-grade and embed them into their psyche by middle school. For example, students adopt the view that because they are African-American their achievement levels and intellectual capabilities should be lower than that of white students. These theoretical findings clarify how essential resilience is relative to minority achievement levels. However, despite this, researchers also found that influences on the social context of these individuals, such as being made aware of racism and stereotypes, can have a positive influence; thereby, allowing students to resist conformance to negative self-images that are related to school performance (Altschul, Oyserman & Bybee, 2006). Many students from racial minority backgrounds are still able to develop resilience despite the risks that seem to be inherent with being part of a minority group. It is clear that the social, cultural, political, and economic impediments that minority students in urban schools face, combine to present complex and seemingly insurmountable circumstances to student achievement. However, as previous research has shown, and what has been the driving force of this study, there are still shining lights

within these minority groups that are able to be resilient to these obstacles, thus achieving at high levels.

The interplay of these primary factors within the home and school environments of the urban, at-risk student, will serve to inform the impact on resilience. While the area of resilience has grown, interweaving between various fields and shifting paradigms, it has consistently aligned with social science research, specifically human development theory and social cognitive theory. Therefore this literature review shifts its focus to section II human development theory.

## **Section II: Human Development Theory**

The human development theory explored by renowned psychologist Erik Erikson, cannot be overlooked in this journey to identify resilience factors in urban, at-risk, high-achieving students. Erik Erikson's theory of psychosocial development (1968), can serve to highlight some important developmental trends that could assist in understanding resilience. Erikson's research captures human development in eight stages. He theorized that people developed an ego through social interaction. His work was based upon the belief that each person must master certain components at each stage in order to develop properly and gain self-efficacy through adolescence into adulthood (Erikson, 1968). Note the following summarizing Erikson's stages below;

**Table 1: Erikson's Stages of Psychosocial Development**

**Erikson's Stages of Psychosocial Development**

Stage	Basic Conflict	Important Events	Outcome
<b>Infancy</b> (birth to 18 months)	<a href="#">Trust</a> vs. <a href="#">Mistrust</a>	Feeding	Children develop a sense of trust when caregivers provide reliability, care, and affection. A lack of this will lead to mistrust.
<b>Early Childhood</b> (2 to 3 years)	<a href="#">Autonomy</a> vs. <a href="#">Shame and Doubt</a>	Toilet Training	Children need to develop a sense of personal control over physical skills and a sense of independence. Success leads to feelings of autonomy, failure results in feelings of shame and doubt.
<b>Preschool</b> (3 to 5 years)	<a href="#">Initiative</a> vs. <a href="#">Guilt</a>	Exploration	Children need to begin asserting control and power over the environment. Success in this stage leads to a sense of purpose. Children who try to exert too much power experience disapproval, resulting in a sense of guilt.
<b>School Age</b> (6 to 11 years)	<a href="#">Industry</a> vs. <a href="#">Inferiority</a>	School	Children need to cope with new social and academic demands. Success leads to a sense of competence, while failure results in feelings of inferiority.
<b>Adolescence</b> (12 to 18 years)	<a href="#">Identity</a> vs. <a href="#">Role Confusion</a>	Social Relationships	Teens need to develop a sense of self and personal identity. Success leads to an ability to stay true to yourself, while failure leads to role confusion and a weak sense of self.
<b>Young Adulthood</b> (19 to 40 years)	<a href="#">Intimacy</a> vs. <a href="#">Isolation</a>	Relationships	Young adults need to form intimate, loving relationships with other people. Success leads to strong relationships, while failure results in loneliness and isolation.
<b>Middle Adulthood</b> (40 to 65 years)	<a href="#">Generativity</a> vs. <a href="#">Stagnation</a>	Work and Parenthood	Adults need to create or nurture things that will outlast them, often by having children or creating a positive change that benefits other people. Success leads to feelings of usefulness and accomplishment, while failure results in shallow involvement in the world.
<b>Maturity</b> (65 to death)	<a href="#">Ego Integrity</a> vs. <a href="#">Despair</a>	Reflection on Life	Older adults need to look back on life and feel a sense of fulfillment. Success at this stage leads to feelings of wisdom, while failure results in regret, bitterness, and despair.

While the latter stages of young adulthood, middle adulthood, and maturity have less relevance for the purposes of this study, the stages of infancy through adolescence provide a clear description of the necessary developmental implications for humans that take place at crucial stages. It seems that Erikson's psychosocial theory (1968) supports the importance of supportive adults from a developmental perspective. Moreover, at each stage of Erikson's psychosocial theory (1968), characteristics of a non-resilient student can be described by highlighting non-mastery components included in the chart. For example, the National Education Longitudinal study of 1988 described an at-risk student as unprepared, passive, frequently disruptive, inattentive and/or underachievers (NELS, 1988). Each of these characteristics counters many of those described in resilient children and can be connected to lack of mastery at one of Erikson's (1968) stages. Erikson's (1968) work has contributed to the usefulness in explaining resilience in students. Furthermore, other developmental psychologists such as Rutter (1988) have utilized this theory to construct conceptual models in which to view resilience. Rutter's model includes six predictors of resilience:

1. Stressors or Challenges
2. The External Environment
3. Person-Environment Interactional Processes
4. Internal Self Characteristics
5. Resilience Processes
6. Positive Outcomes or Successful Life Adaptations

In her work on resilience in sociological ecosystems, Kumpf (1999) makes a clear connection between this model and resilience when she states, "these six areas help clarify the differences between environmental stimuli, transactional environment buffering processes,

internal mediating self-factors, resilience processes used to bounce back after a challenge, and the final developmental outcomes of resilient children” (p.184). In other words, as it relates to human development theory, Rutter’s (1988) model allows one to analyze resilience in at-risk students through their interactions with environment, namely the ability to control it, adapt to new demands, and establish a personal identity based upon success experienced in the previous stages. Human development theory brings focus to how students develop socially and emotionally based upon their ability to be successful at critical stages in their lives. Social cognitive theory add the elements of environment, people, and cognition to the social/emotional stage and analyzes how each of them interplay to influence behavior.

**Phenomenology and Ecological Systems Theory.** In addition to Erikson’s longstanding work on human development theory (HDT), more current research on HDT, more inclusive of the experiences of African-American, and low SES students, also served as a theoretical base for this study. Margaret Beale Spencer (2006) is a sociologist whose work on HDT produced a theory that has been labeled Phenomenology and Variant Ecological Systems Theory (PVEST). Inherent in Spencer’s work is that human development and learning occur in wide ranging social and physical contexts. Therefore, human development is as diverse as the environments in which varying humans develop. As Spencer explains, “the degree of “fit” between an individual’s physical and social contexts and his or her personal characteristics becomes important because it influences not only the nature of social interactions but the makeup of attitudes and beliefs about “self” and others” (p.696). In short, how individuals, particularly adolescents, make meaning of situations, experiences, and environments needs to be explored deeply to uncover its impact on and relevance to human development. Spencer’s work on PVEST has direct implications on resilience in the urban student as it relates to factors in the home and school. For example, how does the urban, at-



risk, high performing student make meaning of his/her situations, experiences, social interactions, and environments? How does this differ from students that are not in urban environments or have not been categorized as at-risk? Are there specific protective factors and/or risk factors that can be examined specific to the urban, at-risk, high-achieving student? These are the questions that it is predicted that Spencer's work will assist in answering, thus providing relevance to this study. Like Erikson's HDT, Spencer acknowledges human development, however similar to Social Cognitive Theory, PVEST contends that the meaning individuals make from social encounters, experiences, environments and other related factors informs responsive coping processes and formal and informal responses (p. 697).

Therefore, as it relates to differences that exists among humans, particularly urban students labeled at-risk, the meaning interpreted will also be different. PVEST, thereby, contributes to both the psychological and sociological notions that despite biological inheritances, individual-context interactions matter. In other words, problem solving in complex social experiences may shape a human's development as much as biological traits inherited from parents. Spencer identifies this as maturation dependent cognitive processes. This process as labeled by Spencer contributes to the awareness of different perspectives and points of view. Most importantly, PVEST acknowledges that diverse experiences yield diverse outcomes. What is also important to point out, however, is that PVEST begins to analyze how meaning is constructed versus the traditional models of identifying what meaning is gained. Therefore, theorists, practitioners, and other interested parties can begin to understand the experiences of urban, at-risk, high-achieving students and how they make meaning from those experiences that lead to certain behaviors or that characterized some elements of their lives into protective factors and/or risk factors.

### **Section III: Social Cognitive Theory**

Social Cognitive Theory (SCT) explains how people acquire and maintain certain behavioral patterns, while also providing the basis for intervention strategies (Bandura, 1977). Environment includes external factors which involves opportunities to participate as well as social support. Behavior requires a certain level of knowledge and skill to elicit a particular behavior. Therefore, the theory suggests mastery learning occurs through skill training. SCT explains how people develop and sustain behavioral patterns. Behavioral change depends on the interaction of the following factors; environment, people and behavior.

Based on SCT, there are social and physical environments. Social environments include family, and friends. Physical environment refers to physical characteristics such as the size of a room. Environments can affect a person's behavior.

Both behavior and environment have been shown to have a cause and effect relationship. (Glanz et al., 2002). However, in certain situations, the environment provides models for behavior. Observational learning occurs in situations when a person observes that actions of another. Behavioral capability is defined as a person knowing a behavior that he/she is exhibiting. Bandura's social cognitive theory suggests that interest is developed by people when they perceive an activity as being able to be successfully obtained (Bandura, 1986; Lent et al., 1994; Lopez et al., 1997). Researchers such as Lopez (1997) have postured that SCT suggests that role models are important in influencing outcomes that are positive. Furthermore, these theorists contend that SCT can help to interpret cognitive behavior of students (Lopez, Lent, Brown & Gore, 1997). These theories confirm Bandura's argument that perceived beliefs are often more impactful than actual capability.

This theory has direct implications for the resilient student and trying to identify influencing factors. How does a resilient student gain self-efficacy in order to successfully manage an at-risk home, school, or social environment? Bandura's theory contends that all people can identify goals and that most realize the difficult task of putting goal plans into action. However, what Bandura's research has found is that self-efficacy has a strong impact in how goals, tasks and challenges are approached. Bandura (1977) asserts that people with a strong sense of self-efficacy exhibit the following:

- View challenging problems as tasks to be mastered
- Develop deeper interest in the activities in which they participate
- Form a stronger sense of commitment to their interests and activities
- Recover quickly from setbacks and disappointments

Conversely, people with a weak sense of self-efficacy present the following:

- Avoid challenging tasks
- Believe that difficult tasks and situations are beyond their capabilities
- Focus on personal failings and negative outcomes
- Quickly lose confidence in personal abilities

Bandura's (1977) theory posits that self-efficacy begins to develop in early childhood and continues throughout a person's life. There are four major sources in which Bandura (1977) theorizes that people develop self-efficacy:

1. Mastery Experiences (performing a task successfully)
2. Social Modeling (seeing people similar to oneself successfully complete a task)
3. Social Persuasion (getting verbal encouragement from others to overcome self-doubt)
4. Psychological Responses (moods, emotional states, physical reactions, and stress levels impact how a person feels about personal abilities).

Bandura contended that an outcome expectation is a person's belief that a given behavior will lead to a particular outcome, while an efficacy expectation is the feeling that one can successfully perform the behavior needed to produce the desired outcome. In the Social Cognitive Theory the proposition is made that behavior, cognition, and other personal factors as well as the environment influence each other through the process of reciprocal determinism (Bandura, 1978, 1986, 1997). Social cognitive theory emphasizes the role of cognitive self-regulative processes (Bandura, 1986). Under cognition, self-beliefs such as efficacy, personal goal setting and self-evaluation determine the actions taken by individuals (Bandura & Jourdan, 1991). Bandura (1982) contends that self-efficacy is a cognitive process that regulates and mediates a person's behavior. This concept describes the judgment that one makes about the level of competency needed to successfully undertake a course of action in the future. These beliefs influence one's choice of activities as well as the level of effort expended when facing challenges. There is evidence that suggests that one's perceived self-efficacy will exert an increasing influence on future performance, and that this regulatory function can be altered by structured mastery experiences (Bandura & Jourdan, 1991). Thus, Bandura (1997) stressed that self-efficacy is a situation specific determinant of behavior versus a global personality trait. While Social Cognitive Theory (1968) and Human Development Theory (1977) provide a basis for analyzing behavior in at-risk, resilient students as it relates to successfully negotiating environments and challenging tasks, a more focused approach looking at the application of these theories within the school context would assist in an understanding of the resilient student.

#### **Section IV: School Effectiveness Theory**

In the research on resilience and at-risk students, the school environment has been an area that has drawn considerable interest relative to its effectiveness on developing, supporting and/or

impeding resilience. Much of the literature identifies schools as places to facilitate resilience and promote positive development, thus, preventing problems (Cutulli, Lafavor, Herbers, Masten, 2008). The literature characterizes it as academic resilience or educational resilience. Theorists in this area have linked high expectations, effective instructional methods, school-wide practices and policies and school climate to decreasing failure and increasing resilience and achievement (Wang, Haertel & Walberg, 1997). High expectations assist students in developing the necessary efficacy needed to accomplish tasks. Furthermore, these theorists suggest that instructional methods have a large influence on learning, and school practices connected with student achievement motivate academic accomplishments (Wang, Haertel & Walberg, 1997). Other researchers have utilized risk and protective factors to develop models testing the effectiveness of schools.

For example, researchers Geoffrey Borman and Laura Rachuba (2001), tested four models in an attempt to evaluate the impact of the school on resilience: (a) the effective schools model, (b) the peer-group composition model; (c) the school resources model; and (d) the supportive school community model on school effectiveness (p.8). This area of the literature was bolstered by studies that also concluded that effective schools fostered academic success in low-performing or disadvantaged students (Masten, 1994, Wang, et al., 1994). Other strong research by these theorists on school effectiveness and resilience include relationships between school resources and achievement, concluding that limited resources has a negative impact on student achievement. A massive body of research supporting resilience for at-risk students posit the essential link and need for caring and supportive teachers, opportunities for involvement, positive expectations, and partnerships with the home (Benard, 1991). As a foundational set of protective factors within the

school, these areas demonstrated a strong correlation to developing and supporting resilience in the urban, at-risk student.

Additional research in the area of school effectiveness and resilience is also interwoven in brain-based theory. As previously visited earlier in the literature review, Erik Jensen's (2009) work on the effects of poverty also suggests strategies and practices that enhance school effectiveness for urban, at-risk, and low SES students. For example, in his book, Jensen's (2009) research proposes that emotional challenges can cause an urban student to act-out, be impatient and impulsive, have a limited range of behavioral responses, and invoke inappropriate emotional responses and less empathy for others (p. 19).

Therefore, according to Jensen (2009), schools should embody respect, embed social skills, and be inclusive (p. 19). Likewise, acute chronic stressors also have some deleterious effects, such as, high absenteeism, low attention and concentration spans, reduced cognition and memory, diminished social skills and social judgment, reduced motivation, effort, and high depression. However, to combat these negative effects, Jensen (2009) recommends recognizing signs, altering the school environment to meet the needs of students, and empowering students (p. 21). Cognitive lags affect IQ, achievement tests, grade retention rates, and literacy. To combat these Jensen (2009) proposes building core skills, pinpointing assessments, providing hope and support, and recruiting and training the best staff possible (p.22). Finally, health and safety issues can also affect students in terms of attendance, punctuality, and disabilities. To counter these, educators should increase health-related services and develop enrichment opportunities (p. 22). The extensiveness of Jensen's (2009) research would allow for thorough exploration of the low SES student and school effectiveness. However, along with the previously mentioned takeaways, there are other general theoretical findings that are pertinent to the resilient student and factors that may

contribute to resiliency. Specifically, the school environment can have a positive impact on students serving to reverse some of the negative effects of low SES environments.

The theory and research that has been explored in this literature review has served to provide a sound foundation in which to examine the resilient student and factors in the home and school that influence resilience. It was my full intention to include a broad array of research that covered a sufficient spectrum in which to approach the topic. Although the literature varies in terms of approach, type, time period, and researcher, there are many similarities that are uncovered across the theories that help to clarify resilience, what it is, and factors that can develop, sustain, and impede it both in the home and school.

### **Conceptual Framework**

Conceptually, this study is based on several theoretical notions. First, resilience is a mechanism which exists within at-risk, urban students and is utilized often as a tool to repel many of the high risk stressors associated with being an at-risk, urban student. Resilience theory has played a major role in highlighting conditions that either support resilience or impede it. Resilience literature that explored protective factors and risk factors both in the home and school environments of at-risk youth provided the necessary lens in which to view how at-risk students develop or discard resilience (Benard, 1997; Masten & Coatsworth, 1998). The theories also grounded the study within a theoretical framework by providing a solid platform on which to build other theories (Garmezy, 1987). Consequently, human development theory was a natural transition from resilience theory.

Erikson's (1968) work on stages of human development, particularly showing how environments are navigated successfully or unsuccessfully, has clear implications for resilience. As noted, the at-risk student is required to negotiate environments, sometimes from birth, that are

high-risk and present a variety of complex obstacles to overcome (Noguera, 2003). Erikson's (1968) work lays out a clear framework that identifies whether an individual has managed the environment at each developmental stage and has shown indicators for positive or negative outcomes. Resilient students demonstrate exceptional thresholds for tolerating high-risk environments, indicating that they are able to develop successfully at each of Erikson's stages. Human development theory (1968) gives us a method by which to psychoanalyze the resilient student at each level of his/her development, allowing researchers, practitioners, and policy makers an opportunity to understand human development as it relates to environments and how it may be manipulated to foster more resilience. Margaret Spencer's work on PVEST accomplishes two things for this study. This theory gives relevance to Erikson's Human development theory relative to the development of African-American and Latino students as compared to Caucasian students, which is the primary focus of Erikson's work. In addition, Spencer's work modernizes human development theory enabling it to be more applicable to the 21<sup>st</sup> century student.

Similar to human development theory, Social Cognitive Theory (SCT) (1977) is an additional area that provides a definitive perspective in which to view behavior. The resilience literature has shown that students displaying resilience behave differently than their counterparts (Mcmillan & Reed, 2010). They are able to overcome obstacles and stereotypical impediments at higher frequencies and higher rates of success. Albert Bandura's SCT (1977) provides a theoretical explanation for the type of behavior that resilient students display. Behavioral patterns such as mastering tasks and or positive social modeling, play a key role in the development of resilience. Bandura's (1977) self-efficacy theory demonstrates a clear process for developing resilience. Students that are able to experience success, observe success, receive encouragement,



or that maintain the appropriate psychological and emotional disposition are able to develop self-efficacy.

Students that have self-efficacy are able to be successful in social environments such as school, building resilience to at-risk factors that often impede their success. Bandura's (1977) theory contends that efficacy is a cognitive trait that controls behavior, and once students develop it they are able to translate that skill into successful behavior traits. Furthermore, social cognitive theory provides an additional theoretical framework in which interactions between cognitive factors, behavioral factors, and personality factors can be analyzed. This reciprocal determinism, as Bandura (1977) labels it, provides a clear look into the at-risk students' cognitive ability, personality characteristics in conjunction with noted behaviors that have been identified as being synonymous with resilience. To that end, one can draw conclusions relative to an at-risk students' self-efficacy and its impact on behavior and resilience.

Resilience theory, human development theory, PVEST and social cognitive theory are all utilized in this study to build a theoretical base for understanding resilience in the at-risk, urban, high-achieving student. Although the home environment is essential to providing a necessary insight into resilience, school performance has been a topic that propels the discussion into high level policy meetings, media outlets, and eventually higher education institutions. As a result, school effectiveness may perhaps be the most visible theoretical notion included in this study, based on the fact that it is the most publicized. Why study resilience in students, if you cannot understand it at a level that informs practice, thus yielding higher achievement? As stated in chapter 1 of this study, urban students have experienced significant achievement gaps when compared to their counter parts as far back as the 1960's (Coleman, 1966). Despite many of the sweeping reform movements that have been designed at improving achievement in urban schools,

there still remains a significant gap today. Therefore, after defining, identifying and contextualizing resilience within several environments, after exploring the developmental stages of human development and its effects as it relates to resilience, after analyzing behavior through the interaction of cognitive ability and personality traits, it becomes natural to look at how the interplay of all the theories manifest within the school context to produce higher achievement.

Subsequently, school effectiveness theory was explored in an effort to ascertain; what are the successful practices of urban schools, which develop and support resilience in at-risk students. The work on school effectiveness completes the study in the sense that it brings closure to the at-risk, urban students' journey through K-12 education. It is the purpose of this study to uncover practices that may be reproduced in other schools to produce higher achievement among urban subjected to at-risk conditions.

### **CHAPTER III. METHODOLOGY**

This chapter describes the overall methodology and research design of this study, included are the procedures used in this study including site and sample collection, data collection methods, and analysis. This chapter will conclude with a discussion of trustworthiness and limitations of the study.

#### **Research Methodology**

The purpose of this study is to identify factors in the home and school that contribute to, motivate, build, sustain and/or impede resilience in urban students. This research question was posed: what factors in the home and in the school that contribute to resilience in at-risk, urban, high-achieving students? A qualitative research paradigm and a phenomenological design with a small focused sample were used to collect data. Qualitative research was selected as a means to interpret one's actions through the observers' eyes. In other words, as Denzin & Lincoln (2008) describe, "Qualitative researchers study things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of, or interpret, phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them" (p. 4). A qualitative perspective allowed me to capture the most authentic activities, practices and realities that will provide a clear picture into the subjects and what factors are contributing to their success. A phenomenological approach will describe or determine factors that influence resilience in the student.

#### **Qualitative Research**

Qualitative research is a method of inquiry that focuses on obtaining an in-depth understanding of human behavior and the reasons that produce such behavior. It has been used in many varying academic disciplines; however, the social sciences have been known to utilize this type of research the most. The qualitative approach explores specifically the why and how of

decision making (Denzin & Lincoln, 2008). Often researchers employing this strategy use smaller samples as opposed to larger ones. It provides an in-depth look at meaningful interpretations of data and enables the researcher to place the findings of a study into context (Guba & Lincoln, 1988). It also aims to let the meaning emerge from the participants, allowing adjustments to be made to the data, data collection methods and concepts as the research progresses. Qualitative research attempts to understand how participants derive meaning from their surroundings and how that meaning influences behavior (Guba & Lincoln, 1988). Furthermore, researchers have pointed out that qualitative research uses strategies of inquiry such as phenomenology in addition to the researcher collection of data with the intent of developing themes (Creswell, 2003).

### **Phenomenological Research Design**

Lester (1999) writes that “the purpose of the phenomenological approach is to illuminate the specific, to identify the phenomena through how they are perceived by the actors in a situation” (p.1). In general, phenomenology is consumed by the experience from the perspective of the individual. Furthermore, methods used with phenomenological studies are very good at highlighting experiences and perceptions of individuals from their own perspectives. Essential to this study is the clarification of the subjective experience that phenomenology provides along with its ability to delve into the experience of the participant. This approach opens up the possibility of accessing the motivations and actions of people (Lester, 1999).

John Creswell has been one of the leading researchers in the field of qualitative research methods, particularly phenomenological designs. According to Creswell (2007), the purpose of phenomenological research designs’ is to reduce the individual’s experience with a phenomenon to a description of universal essence. The description consists of what the person experienced and how (Creswell, 2007). Creswell points out several descriptions for phenomenology:

1. Hermeneutics (research as oriented toward lived experiences).
2. Researchers turn to a phenomenon which interests them, reflect on themes, write a description relating to the topic of inquiry and balance the parts of writing to the whole.
3. It is an interpretive process in which the researcher makes an interpretation of the meaning of the lived experiences.
4. Researchers identify a phenomenon, bracket out one's experiences, collect data from several persons, analyze the data, and combines them into themes. Researchers then develop a textual description (what) and a structural description (how in terms of conditions and situations) and combine them to convey an overall experience (Creswell, 2007, p.60).

This study aligns best with description number four as the identified phenomenon is resilience, and the contextual situations are the homes and schools of at-risk students. Creswell (2007) also lays out several procedures for conducting phenomenological research that will be used in this study. The researcher will use the following format:

1. Researcher determines the best approach
2. Identify the phenomenon interest
3. Recognize the assumptions of phenomenology
4. Collect data
5. Ask two broad questions; what are the experiences with the phenomenon? And what contexts have influenced the phenomenon?
6. Analyze the Data to develop clusters of meaning from themes
7. Use themes to write a textual and structural description
8. Write a composite description that presents the essence of the phenomenon

Based on the research question, a phenomenological approach is best suited for uncovering the answers to what are the experiences of the participants, and what contexts, home or school, have influenced resilience.

### **Challenges of Phenomenological Research**

There are several challenges that phenomenological research designs pose. First, this approach requires the researcher to understand the philosophical assumptions associated with phenomenology. Second, participants selected need to be chosen based upon their experiences with the phenomenon. Third, the researcher needs to be able to determine in what ways his personal understandings will be introduced to the study (Creswell, 2007).

### **Assumptions of Phenomenological Research**

Phenomenology has been synonymous with several assumptions that have to be acknowledged. First, phenomenology rejects the concept of objective research. Inherent in this design is the researchers' own interpretations and biases. Second, phenomenology believes that analyzing human behavior can provide a better understanding of nature. Third, it assumes that persons can be understood through the ways in which they reflect the society in which they live. Fourth, phenomenologists prefer gathering conscious experiences rather than traditional data. Finally, phenomenology is centered on discovery; thus, researchers using this approach gather data using methods that are less restricting than other sciences (Moustakas, 1994).

### **Data Collection**

To retrieve the necessary data, semi-structured interviews were utilized, which is a form of interviewing that allows the researcher to replace or add to previously established questions. Interviewing the participants opened the possibility for authentic conversation and interaction, thereby, creating a necessary depth of information sharing that ultimately lead to the identification

of resilience characteristics, and the answer to why certain students possess and rely on these factors while other students may not. The interview method offers a level of convenience for the researcher and respondents as the environment in which the interviews were conducted satisfied availability, comfort level, and appropriateness (Glesne, 2011, p. 113).

## **Interviews**

The interview is a major pillar for qualitative research designs (Charmaz, 2003). Semi-structured and informal interviews were conducted. In phenomenological studies, interviews are effective methods for collecting data on individuals, their perspectives, and experiences. Additionally, the interview method yielded a broad array of data on factors in the home and school influencing urban, at-risk, high-achieving students. The formal interview questions were semi-structured and open-ended. There were between twenty to twenty five questions posed. The interview questions focused on several key areas used to extract necessary information. The key areas included; (1) relationships with adults, (2) relationships with peers, (3) school factors, (4) motivations, (5) internal drive, and (6) threshold for handling adversity and challenges.

On student selection, a letter will be sent to the parents of the students indicating the nature of the study and how it will be conducted. Once parents have given consent for their child/children to participate, several introductory meetings will be conducted to meet the students in focus groups to explain the study, and its purpose. Each candidate was chosen based on qualification as an at-risk student, high performance on G.P.A. scores (3.0 and above), and scores above the school average on standardized testing measures. Each candidate must be in either eleventh or twelfth grade enrolled in an urban school. All students selected had to be an eleventh or twelfth grader due to the fact that those are the only two years in which norm-referenced standardized tests are administered, such as the A.C.T. The students were interviewed twice, once for a 60-90 minute

period and once for a 15-30 minute time frame. Interviews will be audiotaped and transcribed. All interviews were conducted in the conference room of the counseling center in the school.

**Informal Interviews.** Informal interviews were conducted with school personnel to gain an understanding of the participants in the school setting during structured and unstructured times. Informal interviews were conducted with teaching staff, security personnel, and school counselors. The types of questions in the informal interviews were designed to perceive the character of the students based on observations and experiences from school personnel. Some questions were general. Several questions were related to specific activities that occurred within the school, such as during extra-curricular activities, unstructured times such as at lunch or after-school, and formally structured times such as classroom instruction. All of the informal interview documentation were recorded in field notes for later analysis and review. All professional staff interviews were conducted in the conference room of the counseling center also. Professional staff were interviewed informally once for a 30-45 minute time frame. However, several informal conversations with professional staff members contributed to the study.

## **Site**

The site chosen was an urban high school, located in a small urban city in the Great Lakes bay region of Michigan. The school has an enrollment of approximately 1,000 students and is located on the west side of the city where, typically, middle class families have resided for the last 30-50 years. However, during population shifts, lower income families have taken advantage of the school districts' open enrollment and school of choice policies, many students that qualify for free and reduced lunch now attend the school, either through residence or one of the aforementioned policies. Currently, the school has a free and reduced lunch rate of 74% with 66% of the student population being African American, 28% Caucasian and approximately 6%



Hispanic. The schools' population currently has 22% of the students who qualify for special education services.

The site chosen has earned an Adequately Yearly Progress report for the last four years and is ranked in the 32<sup>nd</sup> percentile on the state's top to bottom ranking. It also received a grade of B on its last state issued report card. The school was chosen because of its location in an urban setting, as well as its current achievement rate despite having a significant percentage of at-risk students. I selected to test a neighboring High School in the city, which allows me neutrality as a researcher which produces reliable and authentic answers.

### **Sample**

Five students were chosen as participants in this study. As Moustakas (1994) points out, the procedure involves studying a small number of subjects through extensive and prolonged engagement to develop patterns and relationships of meaning. Although large samples may provide a broader range from which to probe, phenomenological studies seek data from only a few individuals who have experienced the phenomenon (Starks & Brown-Trinidad, 2007). Creswell (2013) expounds on the selection of a small sample by explaining that a group of individuals should be identified that vary in size from 3 to 4 or 10 to 15. Students will be chosen randomly from a list of 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> grade students. The list will be generated by the school guidance counselor. Students chosen from the list had these qualifications:

- Maintained a Grade Point Average of 3.0 or above
- Scored above school average in Math, Reading, English or Science on the A.C.T. standardized test

In addition, the students were selected as having the following characteristics:

- Qualification for free and reduced lunch

- Family History of School Failure and/or incarceration

## **Data Analysis**

At the conclusion of the interviews and data collection, a constant comparison methodology was used to analyze the data. Based on traditional phenomenological data analysis methods, the data was explored to determine similarities, important statements, phrases, or sayings that clarify the participants' experience with resilience (Creswell, 2013). This step of data analysis is called horizontalization (Moustakas, 1994). Next, clusters of meaning were developed into significant themes. This is known as Thematic Analysis (Glesne, p. 187). Themes were then used to write a detailed description of what the students experienced relative to resilience. This is defined as textural description (Creswell, 2013). The themes were also used to construct a description of the participants home and school environments and how they relate to and influence resilience. This step of the analytic process is labeled structural description (Creswell, 2013). The additional step of bracketing is detailed in Chapter 1 of the study which indicates my personal experiences with resilience and the motivations for the study (Moustakas, 1994). Once the structural and textural descriptions were complete, a composite description was written. This description represents what Creswell (2013) calls the "essence of the phenomenon" officially labeling it essential, invariant structure (p. 82). Essentially, it means that all experiences have an underlying structure, thus allowing the reader to take away a clearer understanding of what it is like to experience a phenomenon, in this case, resilience.

## **Member Checking**

In an effort to provide trustworthiness and credibility, member checking was also employed in the study. Member checking is a technique that consists of continually testing, with informants, the researchers' data, analytic categories, interpretations and conclusions (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Denzin and Lincoln (2005) state that member checking is a crucial technique for establishing trustworthiness and credibility of any theory. Member checks are conducted when the investigator tests the reliability and trustworthiness of the data, interpretations, and conclusions with members of those groups from whom the data were originally obtained (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). This method ensured that the data was accurately recorded, decreased the chances of misrepresentation. Summaries of interviews were shared with participants in order to receive a reaction to the themes developed. In addition, responses were repeated back to the interviewees to check for accuracy. Most of the member checks were conducted in the data collection phase of the study with the exception of a final member check, which was done near the conclusion of the collection phase as suggested by Lincoln & Guba (1985). According to Krefting (1990), selection criteria for informants for a member check is critical. Therefore, the process for identifying student participants for the member check was meticulous.

### **Challenges with Member Checking**

Some issues and challenges have been found to be associated with member checking. First, participants in a study may not be aware of information discovered by the research, and may be troubled when made conscious of it (Krefting, 1991). To protect against this challenge, students will again be selected carefully. Details of the information within the themes will not be shared if it is of a sensitive nature. Second, informants may internalize information that has been shared with them by the researcher relative to the study, thereby affecting responses in a second interview. As Krefting (1991) suggests students participating in member checks will not be interviewed twice.

## **Role of the Researcher**

I am currently a Principal in the same school district as the site selected for the study, therefore, many students selected may recognize my position in the system. All student participants will be made aware of my position, the confidentiality of the study, and given the opportunity not to participate if they so choose. In addition, professional participants will be made aware of my position within the district. It is my belief that my position as a Principal is advantageous in allowing the professional and student participants an opportunity to share authentic answers that will inform the intent of this study.

## **CHAPTER IV. DATA ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS**

Cresswell's (1994) phenomenological method was applied in the analysis of data for this study. Therefore, all written transcripts were read multiple times in an effort to gain a sense of reoccurring statements, reflections, sayings, experiences and/or phrases. Consequently, phrases will be condensed into units, interpreted for meaning and finally categorized into sub-themes and themes formed from the statements and participant transcripts.

The findings will be categorized into five different themes.

1. Self-awareness
2. Adult Advocacy and Expectations
3. Parent and Family Influence
4. Peer Social Support
5. Self-Efficacy

Responses from interviewees will be gathered in these five areas in order to highlight the similarities and differences in each of the responses. Interviewees were asked questions that elicited responses from each of the six categories above. Responses were re-read several times, transcribed, and listed in each of the categories. Similarities and differences in responses will be highlighted. Each of the candidates was as an at-risk student, showing high performance relative to the G.P.A. and the ability to score above the school average on standardized testing measures. In addition, each candidate was also chosen because they were an eleventh or twelfth grader and attended the same urban school. Pseudonyms are used to protect the identity of the interviewees.

The question asked, what are the factors in the home and school that contribute to resilience in urban, at-risk, high-achieving students? In an effort to address the question, this chapter is divided into three sections. Section 1 are the details of the background and characteristics of each

student. This section gives a general summary of each student's at-risk characteristics, grade at the time the study was conducted, gender, ethnicity and specific information relative to future goals and/or disposition towards education. This section is an attempt to give the reader a necessary look into the background of the student, within the context of this study, which allows the phenomenon of resilience to be explored through factors present in the home and school.

Section 2 is a collection of student responses to a series of questions (see appendix B) that provides a look into their experiences both in the home and school that may have shaped resilience. As section 2 evolves, through an analysis of student responses, themes formulate as a result of the factors impacting resilience in their lives in the home and school. In addition, Section 2 takes the data collected from the students and interweaves it with theories such as human development theory, social cognitive theory, phenomenology and ecological systems theory, school effectiveness theory and resilience theory. Furthermore, as the themes are developed, each theme is detailed into a sub-theme section, defining the theme and explaining its relevance to the study as demonstrated by the literature. Section 2 gives the reader a sense of the phenomenon of resilience as it relates to the urban, at-risk, high achieving student and their home and school environments.

Section 3 attempts to capture school factors from the perspectives of the school professionals. Therefore, data was collected and analyzed from teachers, security personnel and counselors that maintained contact with students during formal and informal times within the school setting. There were three teachers, one counselor and one security personnel selected to participate. The comments for the professional staff will follow the student participant comments. Similar to section 2 the data will be aligned to relevant literature and formulated into the

aforementioned themes to further demonstrate the factors present in the school that contribute to resilience.

### **Introduction of Student Participants**

**Leslie.** Leslie, 17, is a Hispanic female. She lives in a single parent household with her mother and has done so since birth. She has one sibling, an older brother, who was working a low wage job and no longer living in the household. Leslie had no extended family that she and her mom had close connections with. This subject was chosen for fitting characteristics, however, she was identified as a special needs student as an individualized educational plan was developed for her as a Middle School student being identified with a learning disability. Despite this disability, Leslie recognized the importance of school as it relates to future endeavors and success, with success being defined as obtaining a college degree and a career in that field of study.

**Michael.** Michael was a 17 year old African American male who qualified as an at-risk student through free and reduced lunch. Michael's parents died when he was fourteen years old. Michael has twin sisters who are two years younger than he for which he felt a great deal of responsibility. As a consequence of his parents' untimely passing, Michael and his sisters moved in with their grandmother, who lives in a really tough neighborhood with a high rate of gang activity. Michael's sources for developing resilience will be evident throughout this section as his responses are transcribed. Michael is a young man who is passionate about his educational development, his success and his sisters.

**Janet.** Janet, 16, like the two previous subjects was also a high performing student that had been labeled at-risk. Janet was a student that lived full-time in a foster care facility since she was 5 years of age. Her parents were originally from Laos and had come to this country following relatives and seeking a better life. Hard times fell on her parents through poverty and drugs. Janet

has fourteen siblings, two older brothers and eleven younger brothers and sisters. The older brothers are on their own in terms of living arrangements. They also lived in foster care for a period of time. Janet is aware of two younger siblings who are in foster care homes. Janet does not talk to the other siblings much and she does not know where her younger brother is at this time. She and her current foster mother are working with foster care system to get custody of her younger sister who lives approximately 40 miles away and with whom she talks often. Although Janet did not talk much with her siblings, she does have occasional contact with her parents. Janet is Laotian and therefore is an English as a Second Language student.

**David.** David, a 17 year old senior, qualified as an at-risk student through a free and reduced lunch designation. He began living with his grandmother when his mother was incarcerated. David is a high performing student and has been for the majority of his K-12 experience. He credits much of it to his high inner drive, and is motivated not be like family members. He characterizes himself as being very smart or intelligent. He is the middle child of five siblings. He has an older brother and sister and a younger brother and sister.

**Tiffany.** Tiffany, 17, is a senior who lives in a family of three with her mom and two siblings. Due to her mother working two jobs, Tiffany bears a lot of the burden at home with the responsibility of her siblings as well as making sure many of the essential chores in the home are completed. Tiffany qualifies for free and reduced lunch and is considered at-risk. Tiffany has transferred to different schools several times during her high school career due to her family's moves and to transportation challenges. However, Tiffany has been a consistent, high-achieving student maintaining a grade point average of 3.7 and above throughout high school.



**Table 2: Participant Background Summary**

Student Participant	Ethnic Background	Gender	Grade	G.P.A .	Family Structure	A.C.T. Score	Family History of Incarceration	Free and Reduced Lunch
Leslie	Hispanic	Female	12th	3.337	Single-Parent (Mother)	20	No	Yes
Michael	African-American	Male	12th	3.738	Single Parent (Grandmother)	20	Yes	Yes
Janet	Asian	Female	12th	3.180	Single Parent (Foster Care)	20	No	Yes
David	African-American	Male	12th	3.216	Single-Parent (Grandmother)	21	Yes	Yes
Tiffany	African-American	Female	12th	3.777	Single-Parent (Mother)	22	Yes	Yes

## Section 2: Themes and Student Responses

**Theme 1: Self-Awareness.** As indicated by Erickson's (1968) work on HDT (Human Development Theory), stage 5 is where adolescents develop a sense of identity that eventually becomes the foundation for development in the latter stages. Self-awareness is a pre-requisite for school success and ultimately success in life. During the self-awareness section, examples will be highlighted of students indicating behaviors that reflect self-awareness. Students in this area immediately begin identifying areas in which they felt had a negative impact on obtaining an acceptable grade point average. Four out of five of the students point to school experiences that had an impact on motivating them to achieve and also allowed them to clarify visually how current decisions impacted future opportunities. One female student recalled a tenth grade experience in which she had received a failing grade in Geometry class:

I had been being lazy in my geometry class, not studying and keeping up with the daily learning focus samples. I had gotten a couple of bad grades on some test and quizzes and ended up failing the class for first semester. I was so scared of my mom finding out because I knew that she was going to be mad. When she finally found out, I was grounded for forever; she really made me feel like I had committed a crime or something. That's when I really recognized the importance of good grades, in the tenth grade when I failed geometry class.

In the explanation she described a feeling of loss and a lack of unacceptance from her mother and two teachers in particular. From that experience, she developed the self-awareness that school was indeed real, and the path to success had pit-stops along the way, some harder than others, in the form of classes that required a certain level of hard work in order to obtain a grade that would have a favorable impact on her G.P.A. Leslie went on to explain that reactions from people such as her

mother, teacher, and some of her peers allowed her to realize that failing grades under any circumstances were unacceptable:

My teacher would always say if you are going to be in my class, expect to have the very best pulled out you. It was statements like these that made me realize I couldn't slack off in her class. It wasn't like that in most of my other classes.

Bandura's (1986) (SCT) (Social Cognitive Theory) labels this reinforcements, meaning responses to a person's behavior that increase or decrease the likelihood of reoccurrence. As a result of her mother's and teacher's responses, Leslie understood that this behavior was unacceptable. She was less likely to repeat the behavior. However, she was able to utilize that experience to help shape her own identity. A male student immediately began to express how the recognition of grades and A.C.T. scores has a direct connection for going to college and for getting a good job. He stated,

When I was in Middle School I wasn't always the most responsible student, but now in High School, I try to turn in my assignments on time to get good grades, so that I can go to college and have a successful career.

Micheal went on to explain that many of the students and adults with whom he came into contact with outside of school, did not share the same perspective towards the importance of education:

It's like most of the kids on my block really don't take school seriously. Like most of them just want to get high, be in a gang, or try to talk to girls or something. I really don't see any of them ever doing homework, and most of the time they try to find the easy way out in class to pass, like asking someone for the answers or copying somebody's work. I

just knew that I wasn't going to be like that, especially with the kind of grandmother I had.

His explanation for his approach to school was that he understood the importance of education himself from small signs, such as adult responses and conversations relative to education. His internal reasoning and motivation relative to education seemed to be sound enough to drive his actions and decision making as an adolescent. For example, when given a scenario involving making a choice between attending a social activity with friends and doing some extra studying or additional work on his basketball skills, without hesitation this interviewee chose the extra studying or additional work on his basketball skills. He explained that his decision centered on these facts:

Social activities have no direct impact on my future; I could always do that another time, but it is important for me to take every opportunity to become a better student and/or a better basketball player because that increases my chances of going to college and obtaining a good career. Plus I really like playing ball, I feel like I don't have any worries on the court.

Michael was able to exhibit self-control as defined by Bandura (1986).

Janet utilized her personal family situation as motivation for high-achievement. She was determined to complete high school. However, she lacked the drive necessary to finish high school to acquire the opportunities that a diploma could present following graduation. She was more driven by the fact that she could be the first from her family to graduate from high school. Throughout the interview process, she continually highlighted the fact that her parents were not high school graduates nor were her two older brothers. In addition, Janet also talked frequently about the role her parents played in her motivation:

Well, most of my family never graduated from high school, so by me doing good, I will be able to help my brothers by showing them that graduating from high school is something that they can also do also and it would probably make my parents proud of all of us.

***Self-awareness and interpretation.*** Margaret Spencer's (2006) work on PVEST highlights the fact that adolescents make meaning from experiences which in turn informs decisions. Janet's personal situation with her family translated into a strong desire to achieve academically and to graduate from high school:

I guess when I first got here I really did not know how I would be able to do in school, and my parents really want an education for me bad, and I also think it can help me get all of my family together to celebrate once I have finished.

Spencer's (2006) theory also applied to David. He made an immediate connection that what he was doing in high school had a direct impact on the type of quality of life that he could have. By looking at his experiences with his family, he drew these conclusions:

I do not want to have the kind of life that I have now because I see my mom and dad and brothers and sisters struggling. Even my grandmother has it hard when it comes to having a lot of money for things. I just want things to be a lot easier when I am grown, so that I won't have to struggle for things so much. I know my mom may not notice, but we all see how hard it is for her and wish we could do something to help.

David explained that no one really told him beyond people who would always say "get good grades". It was an attitude derived from his experiences and observations growing up. His conversations with his older brother, who did not graduate high school, helped him to form his opinions on the importance of education in his future:

Because I was always smart and not always the tough one, my brother would protect me in the neighborhood. A lot of times at night we would talk because we shared a room. He would always say that I needed to stay good in school so that I could get out of the hood and do something for real. He would always tell me that this place was not for me and that I was better than the hood and better than him. He always wanted me to do better than he had saying that I was a lot smarter than he was. I always knew that my brother wanted me to have a good life because that is all we would talk about at night in our room.

As I spent time with Tiffany, I immediately sensed the innate internal drive to be successful. Instantly, she voiced the importance of her education in her future endeavors:

I know that I need an education to be successful. That is the only way that I can get a good job and make enough money to buy the things that I like. My mom always told me that whatever I wanted I was going to have to work for it, and nobody was going to give me anything in this life. So I see her work two jobs for us. I don't want to have to work that hard, so the best way to get it is a good education.

She communicated that it was something that she wanted for herself. She did mention her mother as the person that made her realize it initially. Tiffany told stories of observations that she had made of family members, neighbors, and relatives that struggled through life because of the failure to acquire an adequate education:

I remember older women and men in church that would always ask me how I was doing in school and tell me to keep good grades. They would say always keep your grades up, Baby; it will do you good later.

From those encounters, she understood that something had to be important about school. As she grew older, her experiences in school helped shape that approach even more as she encountered situations with teachers, administrators, and peers that reinforced the importance of an education. From small recognition ceremonies that celebrated academic success, to privileges granted within the classroom and school, to peers asking for assistance with assignments and homework, all of these interactions served to enhance Tiffany's understanding of the importance of an education and how it connected to future endeavors:

It was weird because I could always tell from everybody's reactions to good grades that it was something good to do and something really important. Other than singing in the choir or performing in the Easter play, good grades was the thing that got people in and outside of my family excited the most.

It was these interactions that reinforced her earlier encounters with her mother and family regarding education, its purpose, its importance and the role that it can play in one's life. Tiffany's experiences shaped her meaning making ability, thus allowing her to form an identity at an early stage that resulted in a strong sense of accomplishment and self-efficacy (Spencer, 2006 & Bandura, 1986).

**Table 3: Theme 1-self-awareness examples of codes, code meaning units, theoretical foundations for meanings, sub-themes and themes.**

Behavior and/or Statement Codes	Response and Interpreted Meaning Codes	Theoretical Foundation for Meaning	Sub-Theme	Theme
“I recognized that in the tenth grade when I failed geometry class” and my mom and teachers did not like it.	Using reinforcement as a mechanism for encouraging or discouraging a particular behavior.	Reinforcement, Bandura, (1997). Stage 5-Adolescent identity development, Erikson, (1966).	Personal Experiences that yield motivation for academic achievement and set foundation for identity development	Self-Awareness
“social activities has no direct impact on my future I could always do that another time,	Interactions with basketball coach and teachers as well as personal experiences.	Self-control, Bandura, (1997).	Personal Experiences that allow for the development of self-identity and solidified motivation	Self-Awareness
“I will be able to help by brothers by showing them that graduating from High School is something that they can do also.”	Personal experiences with her individual family members that forged a sense of motivation	PVEST and meaning making, Spencer, (2006).	Personal Experiences that inform motivation and the development of self-identity	Self-Awareness
“I do not want to have the kind of life that I have now”	Personal observations and experiences from family members and teachers.	PVEST and meaning making, Spencer, (2006).	Personal experiences and situations that inform motivation and the development of self-identity	Self-Awareness
Tiffany told stories of observations that she had	Responses from family members, and	PVEST and meaning making,	Personal experiences and situations that inform	Self-Awareness



**Table 3 (cont'd)**

made of family members, neighbors and relatives that struggled through life because of the failure to obtain an adequate education.	adults, personal experiences.	Spencer, (2006).	motivation and shape self-identity	
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*Personal experiences that inform self-awareness.* In Margaret Spencer's (2006) work on PVEST, she contends that adolescents make meaning from personal experiences and situations that result in an interpretation that informs a specific behavior. In his work on self-efficacy, Bandura (1977) labels it social persuasion or social modeling. What can be drawn from self-awareness is that each of the participants shared a personal experience that motivated a sense of awareness relative to achievement, education and its impact on the future. These personal experiences were varied in their locations. The experience for some of the participants occurred within the home setting with parental figures or close relatives such as brothers and sisters. For other participants experiences originated within the school setting with peers or adult figures. Some participants experienced both.

No matter where the experience took place or with whom, it was clear that each experience forged a sense of deep self-awareness that was sustained as a result. Self-awareness is the ability to interpret factors physically external to oneself, blend that interpretation with innate physical and social characteristics in an effort to forge an attitudinal approach towards a specific goal that produces a desired outcome. Essentially, the student participants in the study, were able to use their personal experiences to reinforce the idea that academic achievement was not only important,

but also imperative to attaining sustainable successful results unlike those in which their family members and/or peers were experiencing.

**Theme 2: Adult advocacy and expectations.** In responses elicited from each student, it was clear that adults outside of the home played a significant role in the student's ability to develop resilience. Researchers such as Heartel and Walberg (1997) have demonstrated that integrated networks of social organizations impacted resilience (p.7). In addition, Benard (1997) asserted that caring and supportive relationships were important for developing resilience. This section will demonstrate examples, expressed through the interviews, of adults who displayed caring and support. During her High School years, the participant emphasized there were several adults who had a positive influence on her development. The students' caseload teacher that was responsible for the interviewee reaching the goals set in the Individualized Educational Plan (I.E.P). Leslie indicated that her caseload teacher made sure she provided adequate time, space and support for her to understand and complete her assignments. The student explained that this teacher motivated her to achieve by always offering words of encouragement and advice when things were difficult:

She would always make me feel as if I could share my failures with her, and it never seemed like I had a disability. I enjoyed the fact that during the day I had a place to go where an adult could help me without that loser feeling. I think it helped that she was my caseload teacher the entire time I was in High School too. Over the years it became much easier to share things with her.

Her English teacher was the second adult advocate mentioned who had an influence on her development. Leslie mentioned that the English teacher provided the necessary push for her to complete high-level work when she did not necessarily believe she could do so herself. She went on to explain that the English teacher would require her to re-do assignments at a higher level in

order to reach her desired grade and would not accept anything less from her. Leslie described her experience with the English teacher as difficult, rewarding, necessary, and full of high expectations:

I don't think I would have been as good as a student if she had not been so hard on me. Ms. Black never seemed to let up when it came to my work. She didn't care to hear any excuses, and she always forced me to rethink my ideas. She would always say that writing was an intellectual exercise that required hard work. I could hear those words each time I had to do a re-write. But I would always eventually get it right, and now I feel good when I have to write a paper.

Several areas of literature highlighted high expectations as a protective factor or essential to students developing resilience. Benard's (1997) work listed positive and high expectations along with caring and supportive relationships. Additionally, research on school effectiveness links high expectations to increased resilience, achievement and self-efficacy (Wang, Heartel & Walberg, 1997).

Michael identified adult advocates that he came into contact with at school as having a positive impact upon his achievement. Michael described his coach as a person that "stayed on him" to maintain good grades, get a good A.C.T. score, and work hard on the basketball court:

Coach is hard man. He is one of those dudes that don't let you slack off. I guess it is good though because a lot of us on the team are a lot better off than kids that don't play basketball, so I guess I can deal with it, even though I don't like it sometimes.

Michael's basketball coach would provide a safe place for him and his teammates to complete homework and assignments before and after practice. Interestingly, during the off-season was the time that Michael felt his basketball coach was most effective, by allowing him

and team-mates time to complete homework and opening the gym as an alternative to going home to the neighborhood where there were “a lot of negative things going on.” Michael continued to say,

We could always go to the gym if we needed to and not always just to hoop. Sometimes we could go there to do our homework or for study hall and then when were done we would just talk about things sometimes or we could hoop. It was good for me because I would rather have been there than in the hood.

In his responses, Michael felt that his basketball coach went above and beyond the normal duties of his job. In doing that, he demonstrated the importance of education and the importance of developing a resistance to many of the negative temptations that young men his age often succumb to.

The second person Michael identified was his English teacher. Michael described his English teacher as a “no-nonsense” type of teacher that did not allow students, especially him, to work below their ability. He credited this English teacher with getting him to recognize the importance of working hard in order to maximize his full potential:

She would always demand that I give my best each and every time and she meant that, too. Man, she would make me re-write a paper ten times if I needed to make it right, but I knew I couldn’t get junk past Ms. Black like some of my other teachers.

Michael illustrated a situation in which his English teacher required them to write a research paper on a freshman college course level. When submitting work that was less than sub-par, the English teacher’s response, similar to the grandmother, was immediate and serious indicating that type of effort and quality of work was unacceptable. However, what was different from other teachers, as Michael explained, was that she made Michael see that he was going to

have to compete with students not only at his High School but from schools across the state, the country and possibly international students as well.

She made me realize kind of the same thing that coach did for basketball. Just like in basketball where they recruit all over the country, I was going to have to compete with kids from all across the country academically also.

Therefore, his work had to be at a level of quality that allowed him to be academically competitive with those students. Michael seemed extremely grateful for this teacher's honesty and her willingness to put it into perspective in a way that he could understand. Michael's contact with the adults mentioned has seemed to help shape and enhance the internal drive towards education that he already possessed. As I spent time with Michael during this process, I observed his willingness to listen and learn from adults that he came into contact with despite their particular position or relation to him. It was clear that Michael valued adult input and contact and made a strong effort to apply what he was told. As Jensen's (2009) research concluded, the environment of the school should be altered to meet the needs of students (p. 21). A combination of high expectations, effective instructional methods, and an effective climate allowed Michael to develop resilience and increase achievement. These characteristics aligned directly not only with Jensen's (2009) work on the effects of poverty, but also with other theorists suggesting that school effectiveness can influence resilience and achievement (Wang, Haertel & Walberg).

Janet depicted her current foster mother and case worker as adults who had been strong examples and supports for her. Janet felt that her foster mother and caseworker made conscious efforts to make certain that Janet had everything she needed to be successful academically from supplies, books, and a quiet place to study to emotional support and encouragement:

She was like a mother to me even when she didn't have to be, and I could tell that she cared for me as a person because she would always make sure that I had necessary things.

***Adult advocacy and influence.*** Janet also highlighted two teachers as being important influences and supports by providing direction and encouragement when needed:

Not being able to write English real good, Ms. Black helped me with my papers all the way through high school. She was real good in helping me to understand how to write English papers the right way and she was always telling us how we had to work hard when writing or in English class.

Because of the absence of strong parental figures, it seems that Janet has relied heavily upon her foster care supports and some encouragement and assistance from her teachers to maintain her academic focus and success.

Outside of the home, David identified two teachers that set high expectations for his achievement levels and efforts within the classroom. He explained these teachers never accepted anything less than the best from him. He described their responses as being similar to his grandmother's in terms of their firmness. David depicted these teachers somewhat as drill sergeants with their honors students:

They would always be harder on us than all of the other students. I would talk to other students at lunchtime about what they were doing in her class and the assignments would always be different than ours. She would always require us to do a higher volume of work than others and work that was much harder.

However, in contrast to how he responded to his grandmother's firm stance, David did not mention that his teacher's stance made him feel pressured. In fact, he explained that it made him and his peers work hard to try to meet the expectations that those two teachers set for students.

David felt that these two teachers in particular stood out throughout his educational experience as teachers that had a direct impact on his development and approach to education. He went on to suggest through the interview that these teachers are part of the reason that students in those advanced courses work as hard as they do in other courses to achieve higher grade point averages and to attain competitive scores on standardized tests and college entrance exams:

If all of the teachers had taken the same approach in terms of making us work really hard, then more students in the school would probably get better grades.

High expectations as an instructional method and protective factor, as suggested by the research, played a significant role in developing resilience for David (Benard, 1997).

In addition to the relationship that Tiffany shared with her mother, she identified several other adults who had a positive influence on her development, thus, helping to shape her approach to education. The first person was her youth group advisor. Tiffany explained that her advisor reinforced many of the principles that her mother had instilled in her, however, she did it with a little more finesse. Tiffany described situations in which her advisor would teach all of the young ladies life lessons through their activities, functions and service work:

She would always give a real life example that brought the lesson to life. I remember her always telling us stories of former youth group members and how their decisions that they made had either a positive or negative impact on their lives. She would also allow the former members to come back to our meetings and talk to us about college and life after high school. These talks were really good as I got a chance to hear how hard college was, and how you have to really be a good time manager and make really good decisions. I am glad Ms. Red used to let them talk to us because that really helped me.

The youth group was based on certain philosophical principles and missions that guided their work. As the group engaged in various activities, Tiffany began making connections between, her mother's teachings, the principles of the youth group, and by the reinforcement of those principles by the youth groups' advisor. Tiffany felt as if her experiences with the youth group under her adviser's guidance allowed her to apply her principles to real-world situations:

All of the things that my mom and Ms. Red would say to me started to make sense. It was like they both would talk before they talked to me because sometimes they would say the same things.

Moreover, this extracurricular activity allowed her to come into contact with other peers that been raised with similar values, and after speaking with them she realized that the youth group advisor had the same impact on all of them.

The second adult that Tiffany identified was a math instructor. Similar to her mother and youth advisor, her math instructor provided firmness, guidance, support, and clarity on the importance of an education and how to apply it. Tiffany believed that this particular teachers' math class was a place that was always available to her, even at unscheduled times, to do homework, talk, and come into contact with other students that shared similar values:

I just knew that I was always welcomed and it felt warm. Ms. Alcorn's class was always open at lunch and after school. We would always be in there talking or helping each other with homework. I don't even have Ms. Alcorn anymore, but I still go to her to get help with my calculus.

This space and time provided by an adult advocate in the school setting mirrored the same level of support that Tiffany had been receiving at home and through her contact with the youth group advisor. Consequently, Tiffany was able to reinforce the value system learned from home, in the



school setting, through the guidance and support received from this math teacher. It seems that all of the adults that Tiffany identified as having an impact on her development had similar characteristics and principles as her mother. These similarities allowed Tiffany to build upon her foundational principles that were taught at home at school as well as in the community.

**Table 4: Theme 2 adult advocacy and expectations examples of codes, code meaning units, theoretical foundations for meanings, sub-themes and themes.**

Behavior and/or Statement Codes	Response and Interpreted Meaning Codes	Theoretical Foundation for Meaning	Sub-Theme	Theme
“I don’t think I would have been as good as a student if she had not been so hard on me”.	There is an adult that cares enough for me to provide an appropriate climate and not allow me to underachieve.	Caring and Supportive Relationships, Benard, (1997). High Expectations, Positive Encouragement & integrated social networks. Wang, Heartel, & Walberg, 1997.	Network of Social Supports	Adult Advocacy and Expectations
Interestingly, the off-season was the time that Michael felt his basketball coach was most effective, by allowing him and team-mates time to complete homework and opening the gym as an alternative to going home	There is an adult, outside of the home, that cares enough for me to provide an appropriate climate and not allow me to underachieve.	Altering the school environment to meet the needs of the low S.E.S. student Jensen, (2009).	Network of Social Supports	Adult Advocacy and Expectations
Janet felt that her foster mother and caseworker made conscious efforts to make	There is an adult, outside of the home, that cares enough for me to provide an	Caring and Supportive Relationships, Benard, (1997). High Expectations,	Network of Social Supports	Adult Advocacy and Expectations

**Table 4 (cont'd)**

certain that Janet had everything she needed to be successful academically	appropriate climate and not allow me to underachieve.	Positive Encouragement & integrated social networks. Wang, Heartel, & Walberg, 1997.		
David depicted these teachers somewhat as drill sergeants with their honors students, “requiring them to do a higher volume of work than others and work that was much more rigorous.”	There is an adult, outside of the home, that cares enough for me to provide an appropriate climate and not allow me to underachieve.	Caring and Supportive Relationships, Benard, (1997). High Expectations, Positive Encouragement & integrated social networks. Wang, Heartel, & Walberg, 1997.	Network of Social Supports	Adult Advocacy and Expectations
Tiffany began making connections between, her mother’s teachings, the principles of the youth group and the youth group advisor’s reinforcement of those principles. .	There is an adult, outside of the home, that cares enough for me to provide an appropriate climate and not allow me to underachieve.	Caring and Supportive Relationships, Benard, (1997). High Expectations, Positive Encouragement & integrated social networks. Wang, Heartel, & Walberg, 1997.	Network of Social Supports	Adult Advocacy and Expectations

*Network of social supports.* Wang, Heartel and Walberg (1997) identified integrated networks of social supports as essential to resilience. Likewise, Benard (1997) in her work on resilience indicated that caring and supportive relationships were foundational to the at-risk student developing resilience. Clearly the data demonstrates a pattern to at-risk students, resilience, and

the presence of a supportive adult outside of the home. Throughout the data analysis phase, it became clear that student relationships was forged with adults outside of the home. Spencer's (2006) work on HDT illustrates how adolescents make sense of situations through experiences. From the perspective of the students in this study, experiences with adults outside of the home, within the school setting, including the classroom, athletic contexts, and the counseling offices all served to enhance resilience. Adults were extremely supportive, altered the environment to meet the needs of students and set clear, high expectations demanding that the students reach them. These situations served to foster resilience in the student.

The data suggests that adults students came into contact with outside of the home shared similarities with a parent and/or parental figure in ways that provided a caring environment, set high expectations and, consistently communicated that high expectations be met and if not, they responded immediately with discontent. Resnick (2000) demonstrated that extra-familial adult relationships provided a protective impact that bolstered resilience. It was clear that one or more adult involved in the student's life contributed to an existing network of support that included the parental figure and the peer support group served to strengthen the overall assistance that students could depend upon to develop resilience.

**Theme 3: Parent and family influence.** The first stage of Erikson's (1968) psychosocial theory which spans from infancy through 18 months, indicates that children develop trust through a caregiver's affection. As the resilience literature evolved, other researchers found connections between supportive parents and resilience in at-risk youth, specifically, close relationships with parental figures became identified as a protective factor (Garmezy, 1990; Masten & Coatsworth, 1998; Nettles, Mucherah & Jones, 2000). Throughout the exploration of resilience in this study, strong parental influence has been a reoccurring theme with each student studied. In this next

section, parental influence will be demonstrated through the various experiences between the interviewee and the parental figure in their lives.

Leslie's home situation included her mother and an older brother. Leslie's mother stood out as the most influential person who would aid Leslie to develop a serious attitude towards education. Although she did spend a large amount of time with her mother, due to mother's work schedule, her mother did provide all of the necessary things in terms of emotional security, support, encouragement, motivation, and redirection. It was her mother's reaction to lower than acceptable grades that indicated the level of importance:

She told me Leslie, I am not going to tolerate that type of grade from you. When I am doing everything that I am supposed to as a mother, I expect you to do the same as a daughter and that includes getting good grades.

It was the mother's long talks about the importance of an education that kept it prevalent:

I could always hear my mom's voice as I was in the middle of a hard assignment or wanting to go do something fun. I don't think she knew it but those long talks really stuck with me.

Lastly, her mother's example as a single-mother with a high work ethic demonstrated to the interviewee how dedicated her mother was to her daughter by her willingness to sacrifice so much to provide the daughter not only with all of her needs but with some of her wants as well:

I really did not see my mom that much during the week because she was always busy working. With it being only my brother and me she had to make sure that she provided everything that we needed. I really learned a lot from my mom though because I figured if she could work that hard without giving up, then so could I. I knew I could do it because I would see my mother doing it every-day.

Mom's strong influence, combined with the adults at school contributed to the development of resilience in Leslie.

Throughout Michael's interview, there were several adults that were identified as having an impact on Michael's development, attitude, and ability to develop resilience. His grandmother played a significant role. "That comes first" was the response Michael gave in describing his grandmother's stance on education. This revelation became pronounced when Michael received a C on his report card. He explained that his grandmother had an immediate, yet serious, response indicating that C's were not acceptable in her household. He explained his grandmother's response, "Michael, I don't play that bad grade mess." Michael went on to explain that his grandmother shared many of her experiences with education. From those stories, he gleaned that education was something that his grandmother valued highly, and the one thing that she wished she could have taken better advantage of when growing up:

She would always end lectures with, I wish I had done better when I was in school and maybe things could have been better for ya'll. You might not know it now, but other than family, school is the single most important thing in your life, and if you take it serious, you won't regret it when you get my age.

Janet described her parents as ones that would always tell her how important her education is and to work hard to be the first to graduate from high school from her family. Ironically, she also described her parents as being really confusing and disheartening at times. They always stressed the importance of education when talking with her; however, they would never have what she considered an appropriate response when she does really well in school:

They never would say good job, or just let me know that they were really proud of me you know. It was just always this thing with graduating, and how it would mean so much

to them. I just wish they could come and see me or show up and support me sometimes because it would mean a lot to me. It is one thing to say it, but it is another thing to do something. I just think they always say it, and I know it is important, but it is really a lot of pressure sometimes, and I don't think they realize that.

***Parental influence and reinforcement.*** Janet explained that beyond talks of importance, her mom and dad has never been encouraging and supportive as a response to her good grades. In fact, Janet describes their reactions as very lackluster and unresponsive, thereby, confusing her as to how they really feel about the importance of education. Due to her situation, Janet had no other family members with whom to talk or that had any influence on her beliefs about education. On the other hand, Janet describes her foster mother as a person who has filled that void by becoming the closest thing to a family member. She has given her clarity on her accomplishments, their importance, and how they reinforce her own inner feelings and drive:

She was the person that I would look forward to talking to after doing something good in school because she would always make me feel important. Not only would she explain how important school was, but she would ask to see an assignment with a good grade on it or ask if I needed help with any homework. Those things are really helpful.

David, like most at-risk students, had a family structure that was nontraditional as his primary residence fluctuated between his mother, grandmother and his father's house throughout his early elementary, middle school, and early high school years. He began with his mother being his primary guardian and caretaker. Due to his mother's substance abuse problems and during her time being incarcerated, he and his siblings were split up among his father and his grandmother. During this portion of the interview, David described his grandmother as the most "strict".

Conversely, he felt that his mother and father were more lenient regarding education, school, and time spent on studying:

Grandma was the one that didn't play about school. But she is also the one that doesn't play in the family period. Grandma is the one that everybody in the family goes to in order to get their kids straight. Because I was living with grandma for a long time, it was just clear that school was one of those things that she was really serious about. Her attitude just reinforced for me that I need to keep getting good grades and go to college.

David explained that his grandmother did not accept anything less than what she felt was the best for David's ability, which were usually A's and B's. Her responses to grades below these usually were very firm and included a consequence which sent the clear message that those grades were unacceptable:

Anytime somebody got bad grades they were always on a punishment at grandma's house. At my mother's house or my father's house, you could get away with it sometimes, or get off your punishment early. But at my grandma's house, you couldn't get off until the time was up, or you got a better grade.

His grandmother was the person that set the educational tone in the family for him and his siblings. Mother and father, on the other hand, were described as accepting of those types of grades if they felt that he had given his best effort. Consequently, David added most times if those low grades were attained, it was due to lack of effort not ability. Therefore, it seems that the high expectations that grandma maintained for David kept education relevant and valued at home. However, during the interview process, David identified the person at home with the most influence as being his mom. When asked why, David indicated that he felt his grandmother put



too much pressure on him to maintain ‘good’ grades in school, therefore, sometimes forcing him not to perform at his very best.

Although grandma was the one that could keep everybody under control, I think my mom was the best for supporting me because grandma was always too hard. My mom was better to me because I didn’t need someone to watch over me all the time. I was mature enough to make sure that I did my work and I didn’t get into trouble at school. I was nervous at times around grandmother because she was so mean.

He felt that his mother’s approach, which was softer, worked better in conjunction with his inner drive to be academically successful. David also mentioned his older brother as a person that has had a positive influence on his development at home. David explained:

My brother never did well in school and was a high school dropout, but he would always tell me to do better than he did. He would always encourage me and tell me not to be ashamed that I am smart and that he would make sure nobody messed with me.

From the onset, Tiffany identified her mother as the foremost person helping her to understand the importance of achieving an education. While her mother had not attended nor graduated from college, Tiffany indicated that her mother indicated to Tiffany the importance of education. Tiffany explained that the difference between her good grades in school and the less than good grades of her peers was perhaps, the high value placed on education by her mother:

How I was raised it was taught to me that education is one of the things that you will need to be successful in life. My mom would always say that the further I go in school, the further I could go in life. It became clear to me that she wanted things for me that she necessarily did not get a chance to do when she was my age.

Tiffany communicated several situations that demonstrated her mother's stance on education throughout her educational career. Situations where the importance of education was most clear came when Tiffany performed below her mother's expectations. Her mother's immediate, firm response to what she perceived as underperformance that sent a clear message to Tiffany that it was unacceptable:

I could tell from her tone, facial expressions, and anger that she meant business about school. These were the only times that my mother ever really got mean with me that's how I could tell. She would always say when she was angry that my education was too important for me to just blow off and that it was going to make the difference in my life. Although these times were few and far between, the responses from her mother left a lasting impact on Tiffany and taught the lesson that was needed for educational independence.

**Table 5: Theme 3 Parental influence examples of codes, code meaning units, theoretical foundations for meanings, sub-themes and themes.**

Behavior and/or Statement Codes	Response and Interpreted Meaning Codes	Theoretical Foundation for Meaning	Sub-Theme	Theme
It was mom's long talks about the importance of an education that kept it prevalent. Lastly, mom's example as a single-mother with a high work ethic demonstrated to the interviewee the dedication mom had	Parental Reinforcement and Support, Caregiving, and Reliability	Relationship with Parental Figures as a Protective Factor, (Garmezy, 1990; Masten & Coatsworth, 1998). Trust vs. Mistrust (Erikson, 1968)	Trust Development and Meaning Making	Parental Influence
"She would always end lectures with I wish I had done better when I was in school and maybe things could have been better for ya'll".	Understanding that education was important for her and that she wanted him to realize its' importance.	Meaning-Making from social encounters, experiences and environments informs responsive coping processes. PVEST, Spencer, (2006).	Trust development and meaning making	Parental Influence
Janet described her parents as ones that always told her how important her education is and to work hard to be the first to graduate from high school from her family.	Parental Reinforcement and Support, Caregiving, and Reliability	Meaning-Making from social encounters, experiences and environments informs responsive coping processes. PVEST, Spencer (2006).	Trust development and meaning making	Parental Influence

**Table 5 (cont'd)**

Her responses to grades below these, usually were very firm and included a consequence which sent the clear message that the grades were unacceptable.	Understanding that education was important. A real life example of the impact of not attaining an education.	Meaning-Making from social encounters, experiences and environments informs responsive coping processes. PVEST, Spencer (2006).	Trust development and meaning making	Parental Influence
“How I was raised it was taught to me that education is one of the foundations that you will need to be successful in life”. “I could tell from her tone, facial expressions and anger that she meant business about school”.	Parental Reinforcement and Support, Caregiving, and Reliability	Relationship with Parental Figures as a Protective Factor, (Garmezy, 1990; Masten & Coatsworth, 1998). Meaning-Making from social encounters, experiences and environments informs responsive coping processes. PVEST Spencer (2006). Trust vs. Mistrust (Erikson, 1968).	Trust development and meaning making	Parental Influence

***Trust development and meaning making.*** As the data suggests in figure 4, parent and family influence, students in the study expressed a consistent sense of strong support from a parent or parental figure. Erikson (1968) labels it trust vs. mistrust in his work on HDT, implying that

caregiving is essential to early development of trust. Bandura (1997) contended that observational learning played a critical role in the development of self-efficacy, which leads to resilience. However, in responses from 100% (five out of five) of the participants in this study, the influence of the parent, family member, or parental figure seemed to impact development in deep ways that fostered resilience.

From the data shared in this section, students interpreted their homes as nurturing environments in which the proper care and attention was provided. A strong sense of trust developed between the child and parent or parental figure that allowed communication lines to be established. This communication for establishing expectations for performance and behavior, became essential to parents and parental figures. Additionally, trust became essential to the student's interpretation of experiences with these parental figures. Spencer (2006) posited that adolescents in particular make meaning from social encounters, experiences, and environments, which in turn inform responsive coping processes and formal and informal responses (p. 697). Therefore, as a result of the student developing trust in the parent or figure, student interpretations seemed to be heavily influenced by the parent. In other words, parents did not have to try very hard to convince their children that their best interest was at heart, as a consequence of the trust developed early through a nurturing and caring environment.

**Theme 4: Peer Influences.** Peer relationships play an important role in the development of resilience. This is supported by Wang, Haertel and Walberg (1997) who found that strong peer support groups had a strong impact on resilience (p.7). Likewise, Benard (1997) identifies caring and supportive relationships as a protective factor for at-risk youth.

Leslie's responses indicated that her peers were not as motivated and/or focused as she was. When asked about her peers' approach to education, Leslie responded that they "don't really

care.” Leslie described that most of the peer interactions and conversation centered around social activities and discussions as opposed to conversations that focused on education, schoolwork, and future endeavors:

Most of my friends don’t have a desire to attend college and after high school plan on getting a regular job like at McDonalds or something. I don’t think that many of them even think college is a possibility for them. They will probably just be happy with working or something.

However, one friend, Bethany, served as an inspiration to her because she was the top ranked student in the class. She indicated that, Bethany is really smart and has a strong will to succeed. She was the one friend that served as a source of support as it related to achievement in school:

I don’t think she knew it, but I would look at her as an example of how to be a good student, sometimes. She would always be the one that seemed to be really focused, you know. It seems like she wouldn’t let things bother her because she had many of the problems that most of us teenagers have, but she is strong enough not to let them interfere with school. That is really good and something that I wish I could do like her.

Other than Bethany, however, Leslie’s approach to education was not influenced by her peers at all. She indicated a strong resistance to a negative attitude toward working hard in school and maintaining a high G.P.A. Leslie went on to explain that her friend’s attitude is not a reflection of her own and that she was able to separate the social aspect of her friendships from the educational aspect.

I know I shouldn’t have friends like that, but it is hard to find good friends, and other than not being good students, my friends are really cool. I just have to make sure that I don’t

allow their attitudes to influence mine in anyway. I have been good so far at not letting them distract me, and I think I can keep that going.

It seems that this same strength that is used to insulate her from peer pressure was drawn upon to strengthen her resilience through her educational experiences in school this far.

Michael, on the other hand, had two sets of peers. One group of peers did not share the same perspective and internal drive towards education as he did. Another group was just as serious as he was. During the interview, Michael explained that he shares the same kind of relationship with both types regarding the amount of time spent with each. However, the difference comes in the quality of that time or the activities that engage him. Peers that were not as serious about school as Michael spent all of the time with Michael at school on social activities, such as hanging out, conversations that centered on socializing, sports, and girls:

But it's like one group of friends I am really cool with and like to hang out with because we have a lot of fun and it's important that you spend time with your teammates, so that you can stay close like coach says. But they are different than my other friends who I am in class with a lot because we do different stuff, like homework and talk about college and stuff and what life is going to be like after high school. It's hard to pick one over the other because I like both groups for different reasons.

From Michael's answers, it seems that he recognized that these peers were only coming to school to partake in the social aspects rather than the educational aspects offered at the school. He indicated that they would get excited about only those types of conversations. When conversations consisted of endeavors following high school, most of these peers identified sports as the only avenue possible to pursuing a means of making a living:

A lot of my teammates for friends from my neighborhood only talk about being in the N.B.A. or N.F.L. or maybe being a rapper or dancer. A lot of times they don't talk about jobs that don't include being famous or making a lot of money.

On the other hand, peers that shared the same approach to education as Michael, spent more time on activities related to education and less time on socializing. Michael consistently described his time with these peers as engaging and important:

We talk about our grades and the future all the time. They were better at explaining what they wanted to be though because a lot of them had colleges and professions that they know that wanted to go into, so it made it easier for me to think and talk about those things too. I didn't have to be the only one talking about college which can be lame sometimes.

Although there were fewer of these peers, the time spent was more valuable and relevant to Michael's focus. He appreciated having peers that he could discuss assignments with, learn from, at times help and use to shape his perspective on the future. Michael depicted his relationship with these peers as being just as important as the relationship with his grandmother, English teacher, and basketball coach:

I think they are important, too, because I have people my age talking about more serious things which makes me talk about it. I think I would not talk about it as much if I did not see them in class or at school during other times.

As I spent more and more time with Janet, the relationship with peers grew more interesting because she admittedly maintained multiple friendships with people that did not do well in school.

***Peer social support and influence.*** Janet described situations in which her peers were removed from school and forced to attend school in alternative settings for academic reasons. Janet



also depicted situations where her peers celebrated underachievement, lack of effort, and poor attendance. However, she identified one friend that she considered more of an important influence, similar to that of an adult, rather than a peer:

I have one friend that is really serious about school. She is always the one talking to me outside of my parents and my foster mom about school and how I should always get good grades because I am so smart. She was really good in school, too. I always like talking to her because we could relate to each other so much because she didn't stay with her parents either.

This particular peer was one that offered encouragement and direction often enough to spark an intrigue that forced her to listen. She credited this peer with helping her to maintain her focus on academic success and completing high school, similar to how she described her adult influences. On the other hand, Janet felt that peers who did not do well in school had succumbed to a lackluster peer culture that existed within the school. She explained that she observed these behaviors in and out of the school, and in each setting the behavior was different. When asked why her behavior did not mirror the behavior of those peers, Janet held to her principle of wanting to be the first from her family to graduate high school. From the observations of the peers who behaved undesirably in school, she felt that they were not being themselves, instead they were adhering to peer pressures and desires to want to fit in to popular peer culture:

I just think that they want to impress their friends and be a part of the group. That is why they act like that. Most of them probably wouldn't get bad grades if their friends would say that it is not cool and not accept them.

In her peer social circle she was grateful to all of her peers for allowing her to be herself and for not pressuring her to underachieve as they had. She was also grateful for the one peer that served

as a positive influence. It seems that Janet's relationships with peers served to feed her motivation in ways that were positive despite the fact that most would not view some of her peer relationships as such.

David made a conscious effort to surround himself with peers whose goals were similar to his. As I spent time with David, I observed that his peer group of four to five students served as a support group that provided motivation for each other to be successful. This peer group shared many of the same classes throughout the day because they were enrolled in honors classes. Consequently, these students spent a large amount of time together in class, during lunchtime and in extra-curricular activities. It seems that their time spent together allowed this small group to forge a bond that served as a foundation for building the support group. During David's interview, he would describe situations in which members of this peer group would provide encouragement, guidance, and, in some instances, examples for how to achieve at high levels.

I can always depend on them for advice at school. They would always be the people that talked to me about school besides my brother. My grandmother did too, but it was mostly when my siblings or cousins had did something bad. My friends in my honors classes would always talk to me about how smart I was and about how to do assignments. We would always make sure that we finished assignments and corrected each other's work. We would also encourage each other when a class or assignment was really hard. They were a lot like my brother as people I thought really cared about me and my education.

Additionally, during times of difficulty, confusion, or adversity, David often referred to conversations with one or several of these peers that helped him get through those times. It became clear that this support group of peers had become not only an additional source of support for his

educational achievement, they had also become a necessity to sustaining that achievement. While other students have drawn essential support for developing and sustaining resilience through family and adult relationships, David has been able to garner that same level of support from relationships with peers, who come from similar circumstances within the school setting.

Tiffany described most of her peers as ones that did not necessarily share a similar drive as she did, regarding achieving at a high level in school and the importance of acquiring an education. Tiffany went on to explain that when she attempted to have serious conversations about school, homework, getting good grades, and future endeavors, many of her peers would not listen and would rather change the topic of conversation. Different approaches to education between Tiffany and her peers are evident. Tiffany believed that the biggest contributor to the difference between her and her peers was her mom and the high value that was placed on education in her home. Tiffany felt that many of her peers did not come from homes that placed a high value on education, and she based this belief on experiences that she had with her peers and their parents/guardians. For example, Tiffany recalled many encounters between her peers and their parents/guardians regarding educational issues where her mother's reaction would have been much more firm or harsh than that of her peers' parents:

My mom would have just reacted to those situations differently, meaning that she would have been much more upset and would have put me on a punishment or had one of them really long talks with me. Their parents just let them do it, and sometimes don't even say anything to them.

It was these observations that helped to form Tiffany's opinion about her peers' approach to education. She simply felt that the guidance and support from home was not there, that could have led to the individual development of her peers' values and principles. Tiffany's, strong

relationship with her mother and her strong self-awareness served to strengthen her resolve to not be influenced by underachieving peers, but rather to serve as an example for them in hopes that she may influence their attitudes and behaviors. In Albert Bandura's (1997) social cognitive theory (SCT), he posits that social environments, which includes friends, can affect a person's behavior. Additionally, Bandura (1977) proposes that social modeling and social persuasion are two of the four components needed for a person to attain self-efficacy. As this section on peer influences demonstrates, whether positive or negative, each student drew upon their experiences with peers to develop, support or enhance their resilience.

**Table 6: Theme 4 Peer Social Support examples of codes, code meaning units, theoretical foundations for meanings, sub-themes and themes.**

Behavior and/or Statement Codes	Response and Interpreted Meaning Codes	Theoretical Foundation for Meaning	Sub-Theme	Theme
“Bethany is really smart and has a strong will to succeed”. She was the one friend that served as a source of support as it related to achievement in school. “I don’t think she knew it, but I would look at her as an example of how to be a good student sometimes”.	Drawing upon examples through peer support to provide direction.	Social Modeling & Social Persuasion, Bandura (1997)	Peer Influences	Peer Social Support
Michael stated, “We talk about grades and the future all the time. “Michael depicted these relationships as just as important as the one with adults.”	Utilizing peers that are similar and dissimilar to provide clarity and direction.	Social Modeling & Social Persuasion Bandura (1977) Strong peer support groups in integrated social networks Wang, Heartel & Walberg (1997).	Peer Influences	Peer Social Support
She credited this peer with helping her to maintain her focus on academic	Utilizing peers that are similar and dissimilar to provide clarity and direction.	Social Modeling & Social Persuasion Bandura (1977) Strong peer	Peer Influences	Peer Social Support

**Table 6 (cont'd)**

success and completing High School, similar to how she described her adult influences.		support groups in integrated social networks Wang, Heartel & Walberg (1997).		
It seems that the time allowed this small group to forge a bond that served as a foundation for building the support group.	Drawing upon examples through peer support to provide direction.	Social Modeling & Social Persuasion Bandura (1977) Strong peer support groups in integrated social networks Wang, Heartel & Walberg (1997). Caring and supportive relationships, Benard (1997)	Peer Influences	Peer Social Support

***Peer Influences and behavior.*** Peer influences have been prominent in the development of these students as evidenced by the data collected in this section. In Bandura's (1997) work on self-efficacy, social persuasion and social modeling were highlighted as key factors in developing resilience. In this study, peer influences are a strong factor in the students' ability to make meaning and decisions. Whether the students experience with peers was positive or negative each encounter provided a lens by which to view behaviors that lead to success or behaviors that lead to failure. One constant throughout the data was the existence of peer support person or persons whose values aligned with high achievement and hard work. Wang, Heartel and Walberg (1997) found strong peer support groups had an impact on development of resilience in at-risk students (p. 7). It seems that this faction of peer influence played a similar role to the parent or parental figure in providing

a platform of trust in which to communicate, therefore, allowing a connection to form. The peer support group became an essential element in the development of resilience by the student. The peer group provided a mechanism for the student's to interpret peer behavior in a way that informed high-achieving, disciplined behavior, which produced exceptional results in school.

**Theme 5: Self-Efficacy.** In stage four of Erikson's (1968) Human Development Theory (HDT), he postulates that coping with new academic and social demands leads to a sense of competence. Additionally, Albert Bandura's (1977) social cognitive theory (SCT), depicts self-efficacy as having a strong impact in how goals, tasks, and challenges are approached. Leslie's self-efficacy was evident in her responses. During the process of transcription, it became clear during times of difficulties, distractions or impediments un-focused or off-task behavior was temporary. Leslie would continue to reference her reflections on what her mom would say about education or what her teachers would say about education and those reflections allowed her to re-establish her stance on education, and, through those difficult times.

I think my mom's talks, help me to develop my own stance toward education. It's not like I wanted to be a failure or anything, but talks from my mom, watching my friends and talks from my teacher really helped me to see my potential and to use it.

There seemed to be a reoccurring theme that Leslie possessed an internal drive or self-efficacy that also contributed to her fighting through the difficult times. Most of the times when she fought through tough times were after the tenth grade experience in geometry class. Leslie indicated that before 10<sup>th</sup> grade, she was not as self-efficacious, therefore, she did not have the same approach to education. It was the experience of failing Geometry, the development of self-awareness, support from her mother and her teachers, and social modeling from peers, which allowed her to form the

efficacy necessary to be a successful high school student with the goal of going to college and obtaining a degree and successful career in broadcast/journalism.

I just know I can do it now. High school has really helped me a lot because it has placed some hard things in front of me that I didn't think I could do. But somehow I managed to complete them and most times with a really good grade.

When presented with a difficult situation, adversity or resistance, Michael exhibited varying responses depending on the intensity of the adversity. Adversity, such as a difficult assignment or a tough practice, was met with a response that did not require much effort, meaning Michael took that type of adversity lightly. For example,

I feel that I can always handle those situations. Things that I have gone through in my life make those situations much easier to handle. So a lot of times I don't get real stressed I just make sure that I focus and get things done that I need to.

He has developed a system where he prioritized the tasks, stayed calm, and completed them one at a time. Michael developed this self-efficacy from with his grandmother, his basketball coach, teachers and peers. Michael's forged self-efficacy by what he described as "extremely difficult adversity." He immediately began sharing his experiences dealing with the death of his parents. Michael felt this was the most difficult time that he had to face as a person, as he felt like giving up.

When I was younger, I would always have this feeling like nothing I could ever do was going to solve my problems. I felt like everything in my life was not in my control. But as I got older I began to realized that a lot of things I can change with my attitude and how hard I work. I think once I had that attitude a lot of things that used to be hard for me became much easier.



However, it was this experience that hardened his focus and provided clarity and direction for the things that Michael identified as important. This experience also accelerated the process of maturation, making him more responsible as a student, as a young man and as an older brother. Margaret Spencer's (2006) work on PVEST highlights that human development is informed by the environment's that humans develop in. The individual's social contexts influence his/her's social interactions and beliefs about self (p. 696). Michael's self-efficacy was developed from a combination of sources that all worked in conjunction with each other. The experience of losing his parents at a young age, coupled with his self-awareness has forced Michael to benefit from relationships with his grandmother, his English teacher, his basketball coach and his peers.

*Self-efficacy and meaning making.* Janet's self-efficacy, has developed from her support from her foster mother, the high expectations set by her teachers, the social modeling provided by her peer, and exceptional intellectual ability, and her personal experiences with her family. It seems that Janet's personal situation has had the most impact on her ability to develop self-efficacy. She consistently referenced her parents and siblings as the driving forces behind wanting to get good grades and wanting to graduate from high school:

I really want to do it because of my mom and dad and to show my brothers and sisters that they can get an education. I can be an inspiration to them once they see me graduate, and maybe they will all stay in school. I am sure that once they see me, it will inspire them to do it also.

When situations arose that were difficult and/or overwhelming she would utilize the adult and/or peer supports that were in place: her foster mother, her positive friend, or her teachers. However, in the back of her mind, the thought of not being the first to graduate in her family was always

present and served as the primary fuel for overcoming any obstacle, impediment, or shortcoming that could prevent her graduation from high school.

David developed self-efficacy internally with an exceptional level of self-awareness and a drive to succeed academically. It was enhanced further by the difficult circumstances he observed his mother go through at home with substance abuse and incarceration:

My mom's situation was always motivation for me because I would see how hard things were for her. But she overcame and was still able to be there for my brothers and sisters and if she can go through something as hard as that, then I am sure I can handle a tough assignment or difficult class.

In addition, David benefitted from the high expectations and reinforcement of his grandmother at home and two individual teachers with whom he had excessive contact with at school. David was also fortunate to be a part of an exceptional peer culture that promoted high achievement, provided support for all members of the groups, voiced sound advice that served as occasional needed guidance for David, and, in some instances, provided examples of conduct for how to reach high achievement levels.

I knew I could always look to my friends in class for support if I needed it. Because they were always the ones that were there to help me and encourage me.

It was a combination of all of these facets of David's life coupled with his self-efficacy that helped him to develop the resilience necessary to maintain a high G.P.A., score well on the A.C.T., while dealing with some difficult circumstances regarding his mother and siblings. When describing how he dealt with adversity and difficult situations, without recognizing it, David often gave an example that involved all four of these facets from which he learned how to be strong and resilient.

However, David also recognizes that he possesses an internal drive and self-awareness that contributes to his resilience as well.

Tiffany is a student who had obviously been heavily influenced by a mother with strong principles, held a high value for education, and provided the necessary guidance and support that allowed Tiffany to develop those same principles on her own. Tiffany's caring and nurturing environment provided by her mother, the high expectations set by her teacher and youth group advisor, paired with allowed her to develop a strong sense of self-efficacy. Tiffany was not only able to develop that type of relationship at home with her mother, she was fortunate enough to come into contact with adults both in the school and in the community that impacted Tiffany's development in a similar way. Her relationships with her youth group advisor and her math teacher served to enhance Tiffany's self-efficacy and, therefore, her ability to develop resilience. These caring and supportive relationships have allowed Tiffany to experience success through her early developmental years through adolescence. This in turn has served to reinforce the values that she has learned from her mother and reinforced through her relationships with other adults. These successes have also been bolstered by the observations that she has made of her peers and their lack of success.

These observations have allowed Tiffany to develop a sense of self-efficacy that repels the influence of her peers. Positive factors are seen in the development of Tiffany's resilience learned through her relationship with her mom, her own internal drive and intellectual talents, her relationships with her math teacher and youth group advisor, and her refusal not to be influenced by a counter-productive peer culture. Spencer's (2006) work on PVEST suggests that meaning individuals make from social encounters, experiences, and environments inform coping processes and responses formally and informally (p. 697).

**Table 7: Theme 5 self-efficacy examples of codes, code meaning units, theoretical foundations for meanings, sub-themes and themes.**

Behavior and/or Statement Codes	Response and Interpreted Meaning Codes	Theoretical Foundation for Meaning	Sub-Theme	Theme
Leslie continued to reference her reflections on talks with mom. Those reflections allowed her to re-establish her stance on education, therefore, working through those difficult times.	Maintaining a behavior pattern based upon experiences and interpretations of those experiences	Self-Efficacy, Bandura (1977). PVEST, Spencer (2006).	Developing action plans, processes and coping responses to challenges	Self-Efficacy
However, it was this experience that hardened his focus and provided clarity and direction for the things that Michael identified as important.	Maintaining a behavior pattern based upon experiences and interpretations of those experiences	Self-Efficacy, Bandura (1977). PVEST, Spencer (2006).	Developing action plans, processes and coping responses to challenges	Self-Efficacy
“I really want to do it because of my mom and dad and to show my brothers and sisters that they can get an education.”	Maintaining a behavior pattern based upon experiences and interpretations of those experiences	Self-Efficacy, Bandura (1977). PVEST, Spencer (2006).	Developing action plans, processes and coping responses to challenges	Self-Efficacy
David’s self-efficacy began internally. It was enhanced further by	Maintaining a behavior pattern based upon experiences and	Self-Efficacy, Bandura (1977). PVEST, Spencer (2006).	Developing action plans, processes and coping	Self-Efficacy

**Table 7 (cont'd)**

difficult circumstances that he observed his mother go through at home with substance abuse and incarceration.	interpretations of those experiences		responses to challenges	
These successes have also been bolstered by the observations that Tiffany has made of her peers and their unfortunate lack of success.	Maintaining a behavior pattern based upon experiences and interpretations of those experiences	Self-Efficacy, Bandura (1977). PVEST, Spencer (2006).	Developing action plans, processes and coping responses to challenges	Self-Efficacy

***Developing coping responses.*** The self-efficacy that students in the study were able to exemplify was demonstrated through the development of self-awareness gained from experiences in the home, through the contact and impact of adults outside of the home, the influence of peers within the school setting, and the influence of a parent or parental figure. Each of the five students in the study were able to combine experiences from each of the themed areas into self-efficacy, thus, leading to a keen ability to develop coping responses to challenges and adversity as well as action plans and processes for attaining targeted goals.

Analysis of the data was the ability indicated self-control applied consistently in multiple contexts as defined by Bandura (1997). Each of the five students in the study, were able to handle challenging tasks and adversity. Albert Bandura (1997) in his work on self-efficacy asserted that people with a strong sense of self-efficacy view challenges as tasks to be mastered, and they recover quickly from setbacks and disappointments. Each of the five students in the study,

displayed a strong sense of efficacy through their responses that was fostered from experiences in the home and school. Therefore, they were able to cope with adversity and institute processes for attaining success within the school setting.

### **Section 3: Professional Staff Observations**

To gain a more in-depth view of school factors that contribute to resilience, I conducted several informal interviews with staff members of the school. I attempted to reach out to persons who had the most intimate contact with students on a daily basis to get their perspective on the students selected for the study. Consequently, I selected three teachers in the honors course curriculum, one guidance counselor that was assigned to the students by grade level designation and a security person that observed the students during lunch hour on a daily basis. Each of the staff members selected had at least 10 years of experience. Each was asked, in your opinion, what are the internal and or external factors that contribute to the student's academic success and why these students achieved at a much higher level than other students with similar characteristics in addition to several other questions (See Appendix B). In talking with these staff members, I attained a broader view of these students within the school setting and factors that contribute to resilience.

**Teacher observations.** As I begin interviewing the teachers it became very apparent that these students stood out in comparison to other students. The students selected for the study were viewed as exceptions and not the rule as it related to the typical student within the school. Question; how would you describe the following students?

An English teacher stated:

Oh, this should be easy with the students you named off. I say that because those students are really easy to motivate. When I am thinking about the makeup of my

classroom, I really begin to plan lessons around those students because I know they are going to bring the lesson to life. They are going to participate, they are going to discuss, and complete each task that you put before them, which makes things easier. Most of the other students are really mentally lazy. They don't want to think: they want you as the teacher to give them all of the answers, and most times will not complete assignments outside of the classroom unless it is a desperate attempt to avoid failing. It is different with those students, because you can always count on them engaging on some level, even if it is not as deep as you would like them to always engage.

A math teacher stated;

Those are the kids that drive me as a teacher. And I am not trying to put down other students but they are somewhat different than the normal student. I mean, they represent what I think most students this age should exemplify; hard work, self-discipline, self-motivation, and respect. As the teacher you just have to prompt or provoke them with an intriguing concept, and they immediately respond. That is really refreshing in the sense that you feel like you are really teaching because it is more student centered, which makes the learning more sustainable. Instead of just teaching a concept, I also feel like I am teaching them the ability to be a critical thinker.

As the teachers concluded with reflecting and sharing what some of the differences between the students selected for the study and others, I then prompted them to share why they felt these differences were prevalent.

Question; in your observations of the students', are there things that you notice are different from other students? Why?

The science teacher stated;

Well for some of them I think they are really parented well. They are given opportunities to be involved and exposed to different things. Although they may come from single parent homes those parents are ensuring that the kids are engaged in positive, structured activities. The kids that have this kind of drive usually have someone behind them giving them that push. I have noticed that it is someone also behind them making them ask those questions of how to succeed. I think that the biggest difference is the support of both home and outside the home. For example, for athletes it is the coach pushing them; for the other kids it is someone at home, here is what you need to be, and I am going to take you to church. I am going to get you involved in things, and they also let them know what is unacceptable in terms of performance and behavior at school. I think those are the reasons why most of those students are different.

The math teacher stated;

Those students first of all just seem to have an inner drive to be successful that most of my other students don't have. It seems that they are really self-motivated and have the discipline to feed that motivation. What's interesting is that I don't have to make many parent contacts with those students, and I have not spent a huge amount of time talking with them about their personal situations other than Janet. Which I know most of it is her, although her foster mother gives her great support. It just may be that these kids really individually care about their own futures, and I think they have seen enough negativity and examples of failure either from their friends or relatives that they are determined not to let it happen to them.

It seems that each teacher expressed a different sentiment as to why the students performed based upon the varying experiences of each student.



As we proceeded through the informal interview process we began to touch upon, in their opinion, how the students responded to challenges.

Question; in your opinion, would you say you hold high expectations for these students and how do they handle the challenges or pressures that come with that?

The English teacher stated;

I really pride myself on maintaining extremely high expectations for students. Especially those that I feel have some real intellectual potential. It is the only way that I think will build the necessary resolve and skill for them to compete with those students that may come from more privileged backgrounds or attend schools that have more resources to help their students be successful. Therefore, I really make a conscious effort to develop assignments, projects and tasks for the class that are extremely challenging. Like most students who would consider themselves part of the honors cohort or that take an A.P. course, these students verbalize that they want the challenging work. It is at these times that I have to remain firm and provide them support with the expectation that they are going to complete the assignment at a level of quality.

The math teacher expressed;

I have noticed that these students respond really well especially to the higher order thinking assignments that we have done throughout the year. I think it could be because most times I allow them to complete them in groups which alleviates some of the pressure of trying to complete the assignment individually. Also, most of these students are internally motivated which I think makes it easier for them to step up to challenges. As I stated for a previous question I think they already have set in their minds what they

want to achieve based on what they have experienced and what abilities they have and no matter the difficulty they are going to find a way to be successful.

In addition to gauging how these teachers viewed the student's ability to handle challenges, I also gained their perspective on how the students responded to criticism.

Question; in your opinion or experiences how have the students handled criticism?

The Science teacher stated:

In today's educational climate you have to be really careful how you discipline students and critique their behavior, work habits, efforts, skills etc. With these students though you don't always have to be as careful because they already bring a necessary internal drive to be successful. Therefore usually they respond very favorably to situations in which I have to critique an assignment. Really once I know that I can critique them without a negative response my approach becomes more rigid. With these students the more rigid I get the better the response it seems to elicit.

The math teacher responded:

Most of these students you really can be old-fashioned in terms of your communication with them. By that I am referring to when I was a student and the teacher was like an extension of the family, which meant that the teacher could discipline almost on the same level as a parents. The students however, are such good students that I don't worry about how I critique them. Most times they respond appropriately by meeting the expectations that I have laid out for them and, in most instances, initially they seem really disappointed that they have let me down in a sense. That is the innocence that is missing from most of the students today.

Finally, I really wanted to ascertain the instructional methods that teachers used with the students selected for the study to determine if the instructional approach was different than other students as the literature suggested.

Question; are your instructional approaches and methods different for these students?

The English teacher stated;

Yes, I do approach these students much differently, not in terms of what I am teaching them but definitely how I am going to teach it and the activities and assignments that are going to be required for the lesson. With these students the methods that I use become much more rigorous because I feel like they can really handle it. What I really pride myself on is ensuring that the students at the top are really ready to compete globally when they leave my classroom. That is why my pedagogical approach is different with them.

The science teacher stated;

I absolutely teach them differently. Those students represent what I think instruction should be about at this school. But it's funny because I am really thinking about it now that you are asking the question, most of my instructional strategies are not used with that mediocre or challenging student because they don't have the skills necessary to allow the lessons to reach that level of rigor. With these students I try to take the lesson as far up the taxonomy as possible with as much frequency as possible. But I think it is really important that they are challenged and taught in a way that pulls out their full academic potential.

It became clear from the teacher responses that more rigorous instructional approaches, methods and pedagogies were employed with the students selected for this study.

**Counselor observations.** In an effort to gain more insight into the school environment, I also conducted several informal interviews with a member of the counseling staff. There were three members of the counseling staff at the school each with a designated caseload of students assigned to them based on grade levels. The school followed a looping strategy with counselors, meaning that the counselors maintained the same cohort of students through graduation. Therefore, the counselor had been with these students for four consecutive years. Similar to the teachers, the counselor was really forthcoming in her responses relative to the students in the study. Again, in the time spent with the counselor, I was aiming to determine her perspective on differences observed in the students, why those differences existed, how the students handle challenges, adversity and criticism, and whether the school alters the environment to fit the needs of this particular type of student included in this study. Similar to the teacher responses, the counselor responses indicated that the student's environments and overall experiences enhanced their natural ability to develop an internal drive to be successful. In addition, the counselor responses also described the notion that the school maintained a different approach with these students instructionally, socially, and athletically.

Question; in your observations of the students', are there things that you notice are different from other students? Why?

The first response from the counselor was as follows;

Oh, yes, my interactions with those students are much different than with most of the students on my caseload. By different I mean that these students require very little prompting. Most times if it is a scholarship opportunity or college application or summer program opportunity, I really just provide them with the information in terms of the requirements, deadlines, and they take it from there. The difference is these kids just

want it. They are much hungrier than most of the other kids, and it shows in their effort.

Most times with other students, the tasks may not be completed by the deadline or at all.

You have a few students that are really hard workers, that lack sufficient academic skills, that meet deadlines and requirements, but for the most part it is my high performing cohort that remains true to form in terms of being responsible and self-reliant.

I also asked the counselor to identify why, based upon her experiences with the students, there was such a difference between the students selected for the study and the majority of the other students that she had come into contact with on her caseload.

She responded with the following;

I am not quite sure why they are so different. From what I can gather their home structures may be somewhat different in that they have someone at home that actually cares. Most of these student's social skills were pretty adept since freshmen year. If I had to take an educated guess, I would say that many of them have let on that they really want a different life than the one that they see their friends or family members living. I think that somewhere along the way they have realized that they have some intellectual ability and they are willing to use that to lift them out of their current circumstances.

Now I do know that a couple of them have some mom's that are really stern and provide good direction, but I really think that all of them have an exceptional inner drive to succeed, and that drive is fed by their external circumstances.

The counselor was also asked to respond how the students included in the study responded to challenges.

Question; do you hold high expectations for these students and in your opinion how do they handle the challenges or pressures that come with that?

Yes I do hold higher expectations for them because they have demonstrated an ability to perform at a higher level. As I mentioned earlier many of the students really respond well to challenges. What I have witnessed is that they are pretty resistant to failure. They are just so determined that they are going to do whatever it takes to be successful. These students approach school as if they have no other option to be successful. It is almost like it is life or death to them. It has been some type of experience or a combination of several experiences that has somehow sent the message to them that school is just that important.

It seems that the counselor could share with some sort of depth how these students on her caseload responded to challenges throughout the time spent in high school. In response to some of the literature that suggested schools should alter their environments to meet the needs of at-risk students, I also probed the counselor for her perspective on the present school environment (Wang, Heartel & Walberg, 1997).

I know that we provide extended day services, supplemental services, tutoring, and credit recovery services to all students that qualify for at-risk funding. The difference is many of the services in terms of support services those students don't really need. What I have done though is made sure that they have a consistent space to work after school or during lunch if they need to. Because what I have found is that most of the students on that academic level support one another anyway. They are usually doing homework together during lunch or after school. So to make it easier for them we provide either the college and career ready room or the conference room in the counseling center as a safe place for them to gather and do their homework.

**Security observations.** The member of the security staff that was responsible for supervision during their lunch period and a brief time after school had limited contact with the students, however, the pertinent portions of the interview are as follows:

Question; can you share some of the things you observe relative to the kids on this list? In your opinion are they different? How?

You know the good and bad thing is that I don't have to talk to those students much. In my job I deal mostly with the students that are not doing what they supposed to which means I don't get much contact with the good kids. Mostly they just stay in the north corner of the cafeteria socializing and talking like students are supposed to. I rarely have to say anything to them. When they get done they usually go down to the upper class hallway or to the counseling center. What I do for them though is make sure that there table stays open for them every-day and that no one bothers them in this cafeteria or in that upper class hallway. Sometimes Michael and his friends will hang out after school in the college room before basketball practice. What I try to do is to make sure that their areas are not taken over by any other students. I want to make sure that they can continue to study during lunch or after school.

The security personnel took on the responsibility of ensuring that the students in the study maintained a safe place to study and socialize without other students being able to compromise that. From what I could gather this was not a directive given from the administration but rather a personal notion that the security guard took on himself.

## **Data Analysis Summary**

In an analysis of the data collected in this study, the picture of factors that were present in the home and school of the students became clearer. The following factors were identified as contributors to resilience in the home:

1. Caring and nurturing environment
2. High expectations and reinforcement
3. Social modeling
4. Social and emotional support

The following factors were identified as contributors to resilience in the school:

5. High expectations and reinforcement
6. Altering the school environment
7. Peer social modeling
8. Peer social persuasion
9. Opportunities for meaningful participation

The identification of these factors supported the formation of five themes through an analysis of the data provided by each participant. The data built a platform for identifying the factors in the home and school and developing those factors into themes.

**Self-Awareness.** Immediately upon interviewing the students, elements of self-awareness begin to be formulated. The experiences resulting in failure or less than acceptable results sparked an internal notion of awareness, thus leading to behavior that produced success. Data also revealed that parental influence or adult advocacy also played a role in the student's ability to develop self-awareness. Many of the specific examples, five out of five students, demonstrated a parent or adult influence communicating expectations for behavior and connections to future endeavors,



therefore, illustrating a clear level of importance. Fittingly, parental influence and adult advocacy were also areas which the data supported as developing into a theme.

**Parental Influence.** Parental influence was a factor reoccurring throughout the testing analysis. In each of the five student responses, there was either a biological parent or parent figure that played a role in each student's ability to develop resilience. The parent or parent figure, set behavioral and performance expectations, provided the proper environment to support and nurture the child and provided strong encouragement often. Exceptions were, parent figures who demonstrated behavior that resulted in a lack of success for self and child and for three out of five students that also became a valuable lesson. Adult advocates also played a significant role in the development of resilience as evidenced by the data.

Similar to parental influence, the data for each student (five out of five) also clearly identified an adult, outside of the home, who had a major impact on the students' ability to be resilient. Adults outside of the home were usually teachers who had developed high expectations through verbal communication, responses and modeling as well as intensive caring and support through reinforcement and encouragement. Additionally, adults outside of the home also provided environments that reflected safety and nurturing for students in the school for five out of five of the students, but also in the school and community for Tiffany.

**Peer Social Support.** Peer social support also proved to be effective for the students participating in the study. Data analysis showed that four out of five students in the study had at least one peer or a group of peers that provided support, encouragement, social modeling and social persuasion primarily in the school setting, with the exception of Tiffany, who indicated peer social modeling as a factor in the community context. Although there were peer influences that were

exhibiting self-destructive behaviors in school and in the community, the data revealed that all five students in the study were able to use those examples as experiences needed to develop resilience.

**Adult Advocacy and Expectations.** The professional staff section of data also supported much of the findings in the literature. For example, the teaching staff that participated in the study clearly depicted high performing students as different. The data gathered from the teachers described the students as self-motivated, self-disciplined, and academically talented students who required minimal prompting and direction from school personnel. In addition, the teachers characterize the students as sharing personal traits similar to those of other students in the school. Furthermore, the teachers discussed that while the home may have played a significant role in the students' lifestyle, it was more likely a combination of several factors that included circumstances in the home, the school, and personal characteristics of the students such as academic talent, work ethic, determination and self-discipline. The teacher's data suggests that they took a much different approach to educating these students within the classroom, by using more structure and by demanding quality work as it relates to instructional methods, instructional strategies and rigor of assignments.

In addition, the teacher data confirms that high expectations were essential to instruction each and every day with the students selected for the study. These high expectations that the teachers maintained for the students played a significant role in the students' ability to respond constructively to challenges. As the teacher would utilize high expectations as a mechanism to build the necessary capacity to handle academic adversity. Overall, the teachers felt that there were a number of factors that contributed to high performance levels of the students. These included ability and the combination of home, school experiences, and community experiences.

Data from the counselor was similar to that of the teachers. The counselor confirmed the attitudes of the students were significantly different. The highlighted differences were not in ability or circumstances but mainly in motivation, internal drive, work ethic, and determination toward education. The counselor illuminated the fact that the students in the study consistently showed responsibility toward deadlines and timelines and displayed a drive that required little adult prompting. The counselor clearly communicated that in her opinion and based on her experiences working in an urban setting, these students' lives and experiences helped to develop the drive, discipline and responsible approach that the students displayed. In her estimation, this combination of varied experiences coupled with innate ability is what contributed to the characteristics of the high performing, at-risk student included in this study. The data from security personnel within the school confirmed the environment is altered in both formal and informal ways to meet the needs of the at-risk, high-achieving student.

**Self-Efficacy.** Self-efficacy was a theme that was forged through the culmination of observations, experiences, support and innate social and cognitive characteristics of each of the five students in the study. Each student responses revealed a strong sense of accomplishment, task mastery, and assertive confidence to overcome challenges as a result of developing resilience through self-awareness, peer support, adult advocacy and a strong parent or parental figure in the home. Each student was able to utilize their efficacy to plan processes that enables success academically. Self-efficacy proved to be an essential component for developing the resilience that ultimately lead to academic success.

Overall, the presence of the identified factors in the home and in the school, allowed the students in the study to utilize self-awareness, peer social support, parental influence, adult

advocacy and self-efficacy to develop the necessary resilience that ultimately informed their academic success.

## **CHAPTER V. DISCUSSIONS AND CONCLUSIONS**

This chapter will be organized in the following format. First, there will be a summary of the study will be presented. Secondly, the limitations of the study will be highlighted with explanations. Thirdly, the relationship between the findings and previous research and theories will be discussed. Fourth, suggestions for future research will be recommended. Finally, implications from this study for future policymakers and practitioners will be highlighted.

### **Summary**

This study was an undertaking designed to identify factors in the home and school of high-achieving, at-risk, urban students that contributed to or impeded resilience. A sample of five high school aged students, who were labeled at-risk, was utilized to obtain the data. The at-risk criteria included the following information:

- Qualifies for free and reduced lunch
- Family History of incarceration or school failure

Students that met one or more criteria of the over-achiever characteristics were also screened for the following:

- Maintained a Grade Point Average of 3.0 or above
- Scored at the college ready benchmarks in Math, Reading, English and/or Science on the A.C.T., P.S.A.T., or A.C.T. Plan Standardized Testing measures

Once an analysis was conducted of all the interview responses of students in the sample, and professional staff that participated, similarities were developed into five themes that served as essential foundational factors for at-risk youth to develop resilience. The study attempted to answer the following research question:

What are the factors in the home and school that contribute to resilience in at-risk, urban, high-achieving students? The factors identified in the home were as follows:

1. Caring and nurturing environment
2. High expectations and reinforcement
3. Social modeling
4. Social and emotional support

The factors identified in the school were as follows:

5. High expectations and reinforcement
6. Altering the school environment
7. Peer social modeling
8. Peer social persuasion
9. Opportunities for meaningful participation

When these factors were identified through data collection and analysis, each factor was aligned to one of the five identified themes. In addition, the categories were based in human-development theory from theorists such as Erik Erikson, Margaret Spencer, Eric Jensen and social cognitive theory by notable researcher Albert Bandura. Furthermore, research on resilience, race and resilience, school effectiveness theory, and the effects of poverty on achievement, were explored.

Based upon literature reviewed, identification of factors in the home and school and analysis of data collected from the structured interviews, five themes emerged as essential foundational components for developing resilience in at-risk, high-achieving, urban students.

1. Self-Awareness
2. Adult Advocacy

3. Parent Influence
4. Peer Social Support
5. Self-Efficacy

Each of the students in the sample (five out of five), were able to develop resilience as a direct result of one or a combination of these components. Each student chosen was an exceptional student who maintained high G.P.A. scores, and scores at the college-ready benchmarks of the A.C.T. However, five out of five of students in the sample, demonstrated a strong sense of self-awareness that was developed through each individual students' ability to navigate and make meaning of every mastery experience both in the home and school. The frequency of reinforcements, examples, and successes experienced continued to inform the students' attitude relative to their approach to learning and achievement in the classroom. Each of the five students were able to detail moments in their academic and social development in which they developed self-awareness, from the experience and/or modeling that was provided by an adult in the home and school and a peer in the school or community.

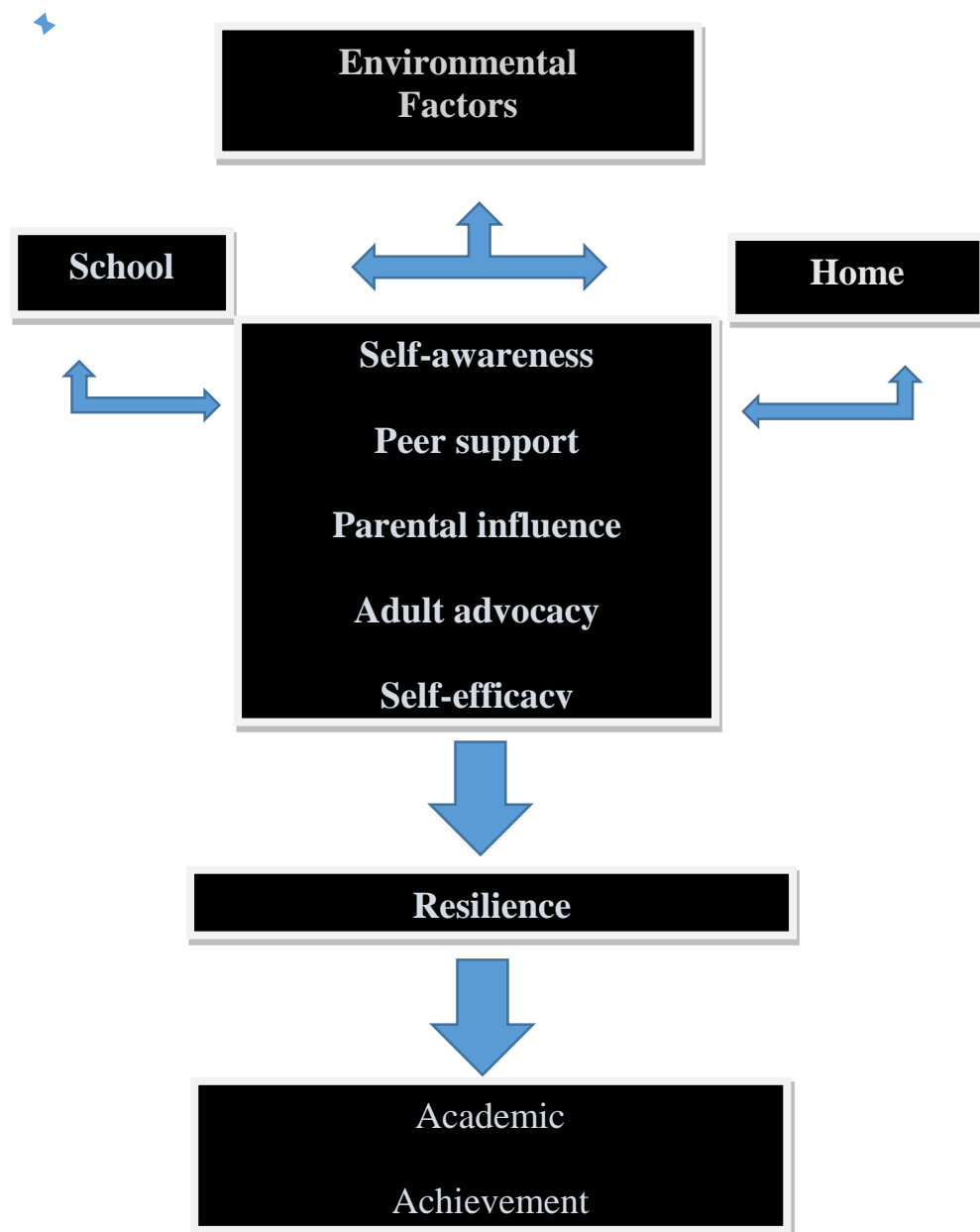
In addition, each student (five out of five) was fortunate enough to have an adult advocate in their lives, which provided reinforcement, encouragement, motivation, and/or direction. Adult advocates came in various forms. For example, for three out of five of the students in the sample the advocate was the parent, grandparent or close relative. For one student out of the sample, Michael, the advocate was extra-familial in the form of a coach. Yet for another student, Tiffany, the advocate was an adult that she came into contact within the community. For four out of five students in the sample, the advocate was both a parent and an adult at the school. The study revealed that the adult advocate component was one that was continuously highlighted as essential to developing resilience. Thirdly, in connection with having an adult advocate. Four out of five

of the students maintained a strong support system both at home and at school. While Janet did not report her parents providing support, there were elements such as guidance and reinforcement for academic achievement that her foster care provider fulfilled. The support system provided direction, guidance, and reinforcement for high expectations for academic achievement and the strong connection between a sound education and future endeavors.

For two of the five students in the sample, the support systems provided by peers stood out in the data. David and Leslie's peer group served as a support system to developing resilience by providing support in times of adversity, modeling as to how to approach and complete tough assignments and motivation for maintaining high levels of achievement. Each of the five students in the sample were academically talented who demonstrated that ability throughout their educational careers. It was this academic talent that allowed these students to utilize a combination of parental influence, adult advocacy and peer social support, self-awareness and self-efficacy, ultimately developing the necessary resilience to attain exceptional academic success. However, it is important to note that based upon the literature reviewed, the identification of the factors in the home and school and the emergence of the five themes, the data supported conclusion that resilience was a foundational component to the student's academic success.



**Figure 1: Conceptual Model**



## **Limitations**

The researcher should be aware of some limitations to the study. One major limitation became clear. The home analyzed only from the perspective of the student. An interview with one parent, parental figure, or adult in the home could have provided a broader perspective on the factors that were present in the home. It would have allowed a wider comparison with the data collected from the students. A second major limitation of the study included the failure to interview the peers of the students participating in the study. This data could have provided a broader perspective on factors present in the school, also information how the participants were different or similar to their peers relative to the utilization of those factors and the development of resilience. The third limitation is the inability to measure the exact effect of the factors on each individual students' ability to develop resilience. Given that all of the students were academically talented, it becomes difficult to distinguish the strength of the role academic talent played in acquiring resilience versus the self-awareness, parent influence, peer influence, adult advocacy, and self-efficacy. Although maintaining a high G.P.A. and college ready benchmarks on the A.C.T. were part of the selection criteria, this limitation still forces the question how essential the other components were in relation to each other.

## **Relationship between Findings and Previous Research**

This study's findings were similar to literature reviewed in chapter two. Resilience theory chronicled the development of the resilience phenomenon into the establishment of risk and protective factor categories (Werner & Smith, 1982; Garnezy & Masten, 1994; Reis, 2004; Reis, Colbert, & Hebert, 2004). Furthermore, literature on resilience documented the shift of focus from a deficit approach of targeting the student, to focusing on characteristics existing in the student's environment that could support resilience. (Rutter, Maughan, Mortimore, Ouston, & Smith, 1979).

The focus of the study attempted to identify factors in the home and school that contributed to or impeded resilience as opposed to focusing on personal characteristics of the student. There were no risk factors identified in the collection and analysis of the data. However, as the data demonstrated, what would have appeared to be risk factors, in fact, turned out to be protective factors that students utilized to develop resilience. In instances where there was a parent, family member or peer demonstrated detrimental behavior, the data showed that students in this study forged those experiences into self-efficacy. To that end, self-awareness, parent influence, peer social support, adult advocacy and self-efficacy were uncovered, and aligned directly caring and nurturing environment, high expectations, social modeling and social persuasion, and opportunities for meaningful participation. Under parental influence, there were many examples given that illustrated the presence of protective factors, such as a caring and nurturing environment, and high expectations, that were provided in the home environments of several research participants (Werner & Smith, 1982; Garnezy & Masten, 1994). Furthermore, data collected that informed peer influence, also supported the importance of positive peer interactions (Benard, 1991; Wang, Heartel & Walberg, 1997). Additionally, adult advocacy correlated with literature positing that extra-familial adult relationships played a significant role in developing resilience as students in the sample depended on support from adults in the school and community (Resnick, 2000).

Findings in this study also aligned strongly with Erikson's (1968) human development theory (HDT). Specific stages of HDT that include; stage 1, stage 4 and stage 5 (See Figure 1.), showed strongly in the responses of each of the five participants. Stage 1 (Trust vs. Mistrust) was prevalent in the parental influence theme in the responses of Leslie and Tiffany. Stage 4 (Industry vs. Inferiority) was illuminated in the peer influence data by responses from David, Leslie, Michael

and Janet. Stage 5 (Identity vs. Role Confusion) was highlighted in the peer influence data by the responses of each of the five students. Specifically, analysis of transcript data indicated that four of the five participants were able to develop trust as a result of reliability and care provided by the parent or parental figure. In addition, data revealed that academic competence was developed through meeting challenges in early childhood that enabled participants to establish an identity in adolescence, thus allowing them to resist many traditional peer pressures (Erikson, 1968).

Similar to (HDT), much of the data analyzed in the study also aligned with Margaret Spencer's (2006) PVEST theory. As the results of the study unfolded, it became clear that each of the five student's ability to develop resilience, were drawn from experiences at home, at school or in the community. Experiences with family, peers and adults outside of the home, fostered contextual situations that allowed meaning making to impact resilience. As Spencer explains, "the degree of "fit" between an individual's physical and social contexts and his or her personal characteristics becomes important because it influences not only the nature of social interactions but the makeup of attitudes and beliefs about "self and others" (p. 696). Based upon the findings, the social environments in which the participants were developing in, provided the necessary experiences, interactions, situations, thus, allowing the students' interpretations from those contexts to inform the development of resilience.

Much of the data also adhered to Bandura's (1997) work on social cognitive theory (SCT). SCT attempts to explain how behavioral patterns were developed based on a person's physical and social environments. Therefore, environment provides models for behavior through observational learning (Bandura, 1997). Consequently, the data in this study revealed that the participants acquired behavior patterns through social modeling provided by parents, family members, teachers, extra-familial adults and peers. Additionally, Bandura's (1977) work on self-

efficacy was demonstrated in the responses from each of the five participants. Leslie, Michael, Janet, David and Tiffany each were able to develop a sense of self-efficacy from the interpretation of their experiences in the home as well as in the school. Particularly, mastery experiences, social modeling, and social persuasion were areas that became illuminated in the findings. For example, as previously indicated, the participants' responses demonstrated a high sense of development through achievement, learning from others from whom they had frequent contact. Revealed through the analysis of the data was the fact that a combination of these factors were what the participants drew upon to develop the efficacy that fed resilience.

Research on school effectiveness has also played a prominent role in this study. Specifically, high expectations and effective instructional methods have been areas in which the data has revealed a significant relationship to resilience (Wang, Heartel & Walberg, 1997). For example, data analysis from participant responses showed that within the school setting each of them had a teacher who maintained a high level of academic expectations for their performance, thus, not allowing them to perform below their ability. Effective methods of instruction were also employed in these same classrooms. School effectiveness theory along with Eric Jensen's' (2009) work on poverty, concluded that schools should alter the environment to meet the needs of at-risk students, thus empowering them (p. 21). Throughout the data, numerous examples were given by participants that detailed the school and adults in the school as offering a safe place for learning and studying outside of the traditional school time and setting. Overall, three school effectiveness factors discovered in the literature showed strongly in the analysis of the data.

### **Implications for Practice for School Leaders**

Urban schools and school systems face problems in providing environments to meet the varying needs of the at-risk student. Therefore, requiring that schools servicing large percentages

of at-risk students, implement a systemic framework that fosters high expectations, effective teaching methods and strategies, and scheduling time frames that are untraditional should be explored. Among my suggestions, school officials should consider extended day hours that would provide the necessary support to yield higher achievement in the urban student. Ancillary departments of urban schools and school systems could be considered in connection with using new physical and social environments for students in support of various theories presented to inform the best response and proactive practices to support students. For example, schools may consider practices that would assist in building the cognitive trait of efficacy by providing social role models within the school in the form of peer to peer mentoring programs.

Social workers and counseling departments could consider organizing recognition programs for students that experience small steps of success relative to social behavior. The interplay of HDT, SCT, PVEST, and school effectiveness theory implemented at the foundational level of all school improvement planning that allows for a system to be developed that supports urban students in a way that yields resilience and improves achievement. Urban schools and school systems would benefit from developing parent training components that include the best practices for supporting resilience in the home. Schools could run monthly workshops with parents, provide parent to parent mentors, and track the data of students whose parents have consistently attended in an effort to increase resilience through achievement. Policy makers at the state and local levels, should write policies mandating parental attendance at the workshops of students who are identified by the school based upon agreed upon criteria. It is also my hope that this study informs the practices of school leaders. Rather than focusing on outcomes of students, this study analyzed processes in the school and home that produced resilient students. Therefore, if systematized, those processes could be implemented in urban schools.

## **Implications for Future Research**

Theoretically, this study delves into human development theory, social cognitive theory, resilience theory, school effectiveness theory and a portion of brain-based research. Each of these date from the 1960's with improvements up to present day. Most recently Margaret Spencer's (2006) PVEST theory brings a modern tone to HDT and frames it within the urban environment and 21<sup>st</sup> century student. The combination of these theories in this study have led to a rich foundation in which to view the impact of factors in the home and school that serve to develop resilience within the at-risk, urban student. Based upon the findings that resilient students draw from experiences, situations, and observations within their environments to develop resilience, future research may be designed to connect more strongly those factors that are operative between the home and the school.

How can schools identify parental influence and build upon those values in a systemic way? Future research can test other factors that exists within the community that may support resilience, such as community centers, boys and girls clubs and or church programming. Analysis of and further research into the role these institutions can play is necessary in order to foster an environment conducive to producing resilient students. Perhaps, the results from these studies, may inform more collaborative planning on the behalf of community officials who administer these programs. Lastly, future research on the impact of the value system and poverty on the urban home may inform the impact on urban student conduct and achievement. HDT, SCT, PVEST and school effectiveness theory consistently aligned with findings from Jensen's (2006) research on the effects of poverty on brain development. Therefore, in addition to looking at the child, it is my recommendation that the parenting strategies of the adults in the home be analyzed to inform strategies on developing resilience and efficacy in at-risk, urban students.

## **Conclusion**

Persistence of sub-par achievement in students as it relates to non-urban settings, has been well documented, chronicled, studied, and ridiculed. Yet despite massive reform movements, accountability measures, sanctions, and policies passed, virtually little to no progress has been made in improving the performance of urban students in a significant way. Despite that lack of progress, there still exist students in the urban area that are able to beat the odds. This study was an attempt to uncover what factors existed in the home and school environments of these students that served to develop, support, impede and/or increase resilience.

As the study unfolded, it became clear that the urban, at-risk, student who achieved at higher levels drew upon several foundational factors within the home and school that served to develop the personal characteristics of resilience. Those foundational factors in the home included a parent or parent figure that provided nurturing and supportive environment, high expectations and reinforcement, social modeling and social and emotional support. There were factors that each research participant relied upon in the school to assist in developing resilience. The school environment was one in which a teacher provided high expectations reinforced through verbal responses reactions and communications. Data revealed the school setting altered the environment by providing extended time for students to complete homework, separate spaces for studying and socializing and different instructional methods.

Likewise, social support of peers was a prevailing factor within the school setting. Results uncovered resilience in participants was fostered through the support of a peer or group of peers. This peer support allowed each student in the study to observe others in similar settings who were successful at difficult tasks, thus, motivating a belief for success in themselves. For David and Tiffany, social values noted by less successful or less motivated peers, showed where wrong



decisions could lead. In situations where peer behavior was not desirable, the data indicated that the students were able to utilize these social examples to inform resilience as well as examples of how not to conduct themselves.

The data also challenged several theoretical notions in this study. The resilience literature clearly identifies risk factors that have been found to be present in urban environments. Researchers such as Fergus and Zimmerman (2005) highlighted exposure to crime, violence and drug abuse. Kumpfer (1999) identified traumatic events, child abuse and living in single parent homes. While the profiles of students in the study included a combination of these factors, the data demonstrated these factors as positive contributors to resilience development. Another example includes socioeconomic status (SES). While the literature points to SES as a risk factor, the experiences uncovered from the students in the study, clearly challenged that assertion. Furthermore, the data indicated that although low SES was present, the factors identified in the home and school were used as stepping stones to overcome risk characteristics associated with low socioeconomic status students.

From these findings several suggestions for future research and practitioners have been made earlier in the chapter. It is my hope that systemic measures can be identified and implemented at the policy level as well as the practitioner level that will enable the research to be replicated across school districts, which will ultimately increase achievement levels in at-risk students.

## APPENDICES

Appendix A: **Table 8: State of Michigan 31a at-risk criteria**

Michigan Department of Education  
Office of Field Services  
Section 31a Program for At-Risk Pupils  
Allowable Uses of Funds

<p><b>Eligible Recipients</b> Sec.31a(2) State Board of Education Approved 2011</p>	<p>Local school districts, PSAs, and EAA with a current year combined state and local revenue per membership pupil of less than or equal to the current year basic foundation allowance are eligible. A one-time application needs to be completed by new PSAs or school districts that have not received Section 31a funds in the past.</p>
<p><b>Allocation Formula</b> Sec. 31a(1) and (3) State Board of Education Approved 2011</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Based on the foundation allowance and the previous year's Fall membership and number of pupils eligible for free meals (11.5 percent of foundation allowance X free eligibility count);</li> <li>• For PSAs that began operation after the previous year's membership count day, funding is based on a per pupil amount to stay within the State appropriation.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Eligible Pupils</b> Sec. 31a(16)</p>	<p>Pupils must meet at least 2 of the following criteria:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Victim of child abuse or neglect.</li> <li>• Below grade level in English/Language Arts (ELA) and Communication Skills, Mathematics, Science or Social Studies.</li> <li>• Pregnant teenager or teenage parent.</li> <li>• Eligible for free or reduced-price lunch.</li> <li>• Atypical behavior or attendance patterns.</li> <li>• Family history of school failure, incarceration, or substance abuse.</li> </ul> <p style="text-align: center;">OR</p> <p>Pupils who did not achieve proficiency on the most recent Michigan Educational Assessment Program (MEAP) or Michigan Merit Exam (MME) on English/language arts, mathematics, science or social studies test for which results for the pupil have been received.</p> <p style="text-align: center;">OR</p> <p>Pupils in grade K-3 who are at risk of not meeting the district's core academic curricular objectives in English/language arts or mathematics.</p> <p style="text-align: center;">OR</p> <p>All pupils in a priority school as defined in the elementary and secondary education act of 2001 flexibility request approved by the Michigan Department of Education.</p>

Origin 12/10/09  
Amended 9/12/13

## Appendix B: Student Participant Interview Questionnaire

Ramont M. Roberts  
Structured Interview Questions

The influence of home and school on resilience: A phenomenological study of high-achieving,  
at-risk, urban students.

EAD 999

Michigan State University

1. Why do you think you get good grades?
2. Do you have peers that do not get good grades in school?
3. When comparing you and your peers
4. Are there things that get in the way of you getting good grades?
5. Can you rank these areas in terms of importance to you and explain why?
  - A. Education
  - B. Social activities/time with peers
  - C. Athletics or extra-curricular activities
  - D. Social acceptance
6. What extra-curricular activities are you involved in?
7. Where do you have access to books, a computer or the internet?
8. What is your routine when you come home from school?
9. How would you describe your parents/guardians stance on education? Give me an example of a response when you did good and bad.
10. Who would you identify as an important influence in your life in the following areas: why?
  - A. Home
  - B. School
  - C. Community
11. How would you describe your teacher's stance on education?
12. Do you see a connection between school and your future? Why? What is the connection?
13. What else or who else would you identify as an inspiration to you?
14. Tell me about a time when you felt defeated in a task. How did you respond?
15. Tell me about a time when you were distracted or preoccupied during school or a homework assignment. What did you do?
16. Tell me about a time when you felt like giving up on something that was required at school. What did you do?
17. Describe a time when things were really difficult at school. What did you do?
18. Tell me about a time when you decided to give up on a goal.
19. Tell me about a time when you felt overwhelmed with school and/or home responsibilities. How often does it occur? How do you respond?
20. Tell me about the last time you endured criticism. How did it make you feel?

## Appendix C: Professional Participant Interview Questionnaire

Ramont M. Roberts

### Informal Interview Questions-Professional Participants

The influence of home and school on resilience: A phenomenological study of high-achieving, at-risk, urban students.

EAD 999

Michigan State University

1. How would you describe (subject's name)?
2. In your observations of the students', are there things that you notice are different from other students? Why?
3. In your opinion, would you say you hold high expectations for these students and how do they handle the challenges or pressures that come with that?
4. In your opinion or experiences how have the students handled criticism?
5. Are your instructional approaches and methods different for these students?

## Appendix D: Table 9: A.C.T. site averages and state averages

ACT PROFILE REPORT - High School: SECTION I, EXECUTIVE SUMMARY						PAGE 7
Michigan State Testing 2013-2014						Code 233280
Grade 11 Tested Students - College Reportable						ARTHUR HILL HIGH SCHOOL
Total Students in Report: 181						SAGINAW, MI

Table 1.1. Five Year Trends—Percent of Students Who Met College Readiness Benchmarks

Year	Number of Students Tested		Percent Who Met Benchmarks									
			English		Mathematics		Reading		Science		Met All Four	
	School	State	School	State	School	State	School	State	School	State	School	State
2009-2010	206	117,014	21	54	10	31	12	40	2	22	1	17
2010-2011	220	113,809	27	54	12	33	17	41	4	23	1	18
2011-2012	174	111,192	27	55	11	34	12	41	2	24	1	18
2012-2013	155	110,537	27	57	6	34	14	42	2	23	1	18
2013-2014	181	109,505	22	57	6	33	10	38	7	32	2	20

Table 1.2. Five Year Trends—Average ACT Scores

Year	Number of Students Tested		Average ACT Scores									
			English		Mathematics		Reading		Science		Composite	
	School	State	School	State	School	State	School	State	School	State	School	State
2009-2010	206	117,014	14.6	18.6	16.8	19.5	15.8	19.6	16.3	19.8	16.0	19.5
2010-2011	220	113,809	15.0	18.5	17.4	19.6	16.2	19.3	17.1	20.0	16.5	19.5
2011-2012	174	111,192	14.9	18.9	17.1	19.8	15.4	19.6	16.6	20.0	16.1	19.7
2012-2013	155	110,537	14.5	18.9	16.2	19.7	15.9	19.7	16.3	20.2	15.9	19.7
2013-2014	181	109,505	14.3	19.0	16.5	19.7	16.0	19.9	16.3	20.2	15.9	19.8

Table 1.3. Five Year Trends—Average ACT Scores Statewide

Year	Number of Students Tested		Average ACT Scores				
			English	Mathematics	Reading	Science	Composite
2009-2010		117,014	18.6	19.5	19.6	19.8	19.5
2010-2011		113,809	18.5	19.6	19.3	20.0	19.5
2011-2012		111,192	18.9	19.8	19.6	20.0	19.7
2012-2013		110,537	18.9	19.7	19.7	20.2	19.7
2013-2014		109,505	19.0	19.7	19.9	20.2	19.8

## Appendix E: Parent and student consent form

### Research Participant Information and Consent Form Parent & Child

**\*You in this document refers to Parent and/or Child**

You (Parent & Child) are being asked to participate in a research study. Researchers are required to provide a consent form to inform you about the research study, to convey that participation is voluntary, to explain risks and benefits of participation, and to empower you (Parent & Child) to make an informed decision. You (Parent & Child) should feel free to ask the researchers any questions you may have.

Study Title: The influence of home and school on resilience. A Phenomenological Study of urban, at-risk, high achieving students.

Researcher and Title: Ramont M. Roberts Ph.D Candidate/ Principal Saginaw High School

Department and Institution: Educational Administration/Michigan State University

Address and Contact Information: 3100 Webber St. Saginaw, MI 48601

Sponsor: N/A

#### 1. PURPOSE OF RESEARCH

**(This is a required element of consent)**

You are being asked to participate in a research study of urban students that have shown exceptional academic achievement, during their tenure as a High School Student.

- You (Child) have been selected as a possible participant in this study of your achievement scores on standardized tests, your grade point average, your attendance and your ability to qualify as an at-risk student.
- From this study, the researchers hope to learn ...what factors exist in the home and school environments of urban, at-risk that allow them to achieve at high levels.
- Your (Child) participation in this study will take about 2 hours of interview time (in two separate 60 minute sessions).
- If appropriate:
  - Student participants will be recommended by the counselor and asked to participate.
  - If you are under 18, you (child) cannot be in this study without parental permission.
  - In the entire study, 5 people are being asked to participate. (provide number)

#### 2. WHAT YOU (Child) WILL DO

**(This is a required element of consent)**

- All student participants will only be required to participate in two semi-structured interview session.
- Student participants will not be asked to provide any personal or sensitive information, however, they will be asked to give honest responses.
- Subjects will be informed that their responses are confidential and will not be shared with anyone other than the researcher.

This consent form was approved by a Michigan State University Institutional Review Board. Approved 08/21/14 - valid through 08/20/15. This version supersedes all previous versions. IRB # 14-701.

(Appendix E cont'd)

### **3. POTENTIAL BENEFITS**

Subject will not see any direct benefit from this study, however, participation in the study will help the researcher gain a better understanding of how to increase the achievement levels of urban, at-risk students.

### **4. POTENTIAL RISKS**

**(This is a required element of consent)**

There are not foreseeable risks associated with participation in this study.

### **5. PRIVACY AND CONFIDENTIALITY**

- Information you(Child) share will be kept confidential to the maximum extent allowable by law.
- Who will have access to the data?
- Researchers and Research Staff.
- Institutional Review Board (IRB).

### **6. YOUR RIGHTS TO PARTICIPATE, SAY NO, OR WITHDRAW**

- Participation is voluntary. Refusal to participate will involve no penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. You (Parent & Child) may discontinue participation at any time without penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled.
- You (Parent & Child) have the right to say no.
- You (Parent & Child) may change your mind at any time and withdraw.
- You (Parent & Child) may choose not to answer specific questions or to stop participating at any time.

### **7. COSTS AND COMPENSATION FOR BEING IN THE STUDY**

- You (Parent & Child) will not receive money or any other form of compensation for participating in this study.

### **8. CONTACT INFORMATION**

If you (Parent & Child) have concerns or questions about this study, such as scientific issues, how to do any part of it or to report an injury, please contact the researcher.

Ramont M. Roberts

3100 Webber St.

Saginaw, MI. 48601

Email: [rmroberts@spsd.net](mailto:rmroberts@spsd.net)

Phone: (989) 399-6001

If you (Parent & Child) have questions or concerns about your role and rights as a research participant, would like to obtain information or offer input, or would like to register a complaint about this study, you may contact, anonymously if you wish, the Michigan State University's Human Research Protection Program at 517-355-2180, Fax 517-432-4503, or e-mail [irb@msu.edu](mailto:irb@msu.edu) or regular mail at Olds Hall, 408 West Circle Drive #207, MSU, East Lansing, MI 48824.

This consent form was approved by a Michigan State University Institutional Review Board. Approved 08/21/14 - valid through 08/20/15. This version supersedes all previous versions. IRB # 14-701.



**9. DOCUMENTATION OF INFORMED CONSENT.**

Your signature below means that you voluntarily agree to participate in this research study.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Parent Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of Assenting Child

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

- I agree to allow audio taping/video taping of the interview.  
☐ Yes                      ☐ No                      Initials \_\_\_\_\_
  
- I agree to allow audio taping/video taping of the interview.  
☐ Yes                      ☐ No                      Initials \_\_\_\_\_

### **Research Participant Information and Consent Form Professional Participants Only**

You are being asked to participate in a research study. Researchers are required to provide a consent form to inform you about the research study, to convey that participation is voluntary, to explain risks and benefits of participation, and to empower you to make an informed decision. You should feel free to ask the researchers any questions you may have.

Study Title: The influence of home and school on resilience. A Phenomenological Study of urban, at-risk, high achieving students.

Researcher and Title: Ramont M. Roberts Ph.D Candidate/ Principal Saginaw High School

Department and Institution: Educational Administration/Michigan State University

Address and Contact Information: 3100 Webber St. Saginaw, MI 48601

Sponsor: N/A

#### **10. PURPOSE OF RESEARCH**

**(This is a required element of consent)**

You are being asked to participate in a research study of urban students that have shown exceptional academic achievement, during their tenure as a High School Student.

- You have been selected as a possible participant in this study because of your frequent contact with students in the school setting and your unique position to observe them in the natural school environment. From this study, the researchers hope to learn ...what factors exist in the home and school environments of urban, at-risk that allow them to achieve at high levels.
- Your participation in this study will take about 30 minutes of interview time.
- If appropriate:
  - Professional participants will be randomly selected by the researcher and asked to participate.
  - If you are under 18, you cannot be in this study without parental permission.
  - In the entire study, 5 people are being asked to participate. (provide number)

#### **11. WHAT YOU WILL DO**

**(This is a required element of consent)**

- All professional participants will only be required to participate in one semi-structured interview session.
- Professional participants will not be asked to provide any personal or sensitive information, however, they will be asked to give honest responses.
- Subjects will be informed that their responses are confidential and will not be shared with anyone other than the researcher.
- You will be asked specific questions relative to your observations, interactions and responses to selected subjects for this study.

(Appendix F cont'd)

## **12. POTENTIAL BENEFITS**

Subject will not see any direct benefit from this study, however, participation in the study will help the researcher gain a better understanding of how to increase the achievement levels of urban, at-risk students.

## **13. POTENTIAL RISKS**

**(This is a required element of consent)**

There are not foreseeable risks associated with participation in this study.

## **14. PRIVACY AND CONFIDENTIALITY**

- Information you share will be kept confidential to the maximum extent allowable by law.
- Who will have access to the data?
- Researchers and Research Staff.
- Institutional Review Board (IRB).

## **15. YOUR RIGHTS TO PARTICIPATE, SAY NO, OR WITHDRAW**

- Participation is voluntary. Refusal to participate will involve no penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. You may discontinue participation at any time without penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled.
- You have the right to say no.
- You may change your mind at any time and withdraw.
- You may choose not to answer specific questions or to stop participating at any time.

## **16. COSTS AND COMPENSATION FOR BEING IN THE STUDY**

- You will not receive money or any other form of compensation for participating in this study.

## **17. CONTACT INFORMATION**

If you have concerns or questions about this study, such as scientific issues, how to do any part of it or to report an injury, please contact the researcher.

Ramont M. Roberts

3100 Webber St.

Saginaw, MI. 48601

Email: [rmroberts@spsd.net](mailto:rmroberts@spsd.net)

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(Appendix F cont'd)

**18. DOCUMENTATION OF INFORMED CONSENT.**

Your signature below means that you voluntarily agree to participate in this research study.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

- I agree to allow audio taping/video taping of the interview.  
☐ Yes                      ☐ No                      Initials \_\_\_\_\_

- I agree to allow audio taping/video taping of the interview.  
☐ Yes                      ☐ No                      Initials \_\_\_\_\_

This consent form was approved by a Michigan State University Institutional Review Board. Approved 08/21/14 - valid through 08/20/15. This version supersedes all previous versions. IRB # 14-701.

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