

A STUDY OF THE LIVED EXPERIENCES OF STUDENTS AND STAFF AT AN
ALTERNATIVE SCHOOL DEDICATED TO DIMINISHING THE ACHIEVEMENT GAP

By

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ABSTRACT

A STUDY OF THE LIVED EXPERIENCES OF STUDENTS AND STAFF AT AN ALTERNATIVE SCHOOL DEDICATED TO DIMINISHING THE ACHIEVEMENT GAP

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Alternative education literature is consistent with quantitative findings, negative accounts or the experiences of white working-class youth. This qualitative study utilized a phenomenological approach to explore the lived experiences of students and staff in an alternative school where predominately students of color persist, graduate from high school, and pursue institutions of higher education. A phenomenological approach was used, because this method provided deeper descriptions and insightful understandings of the participants' experiences.

In this study, the sample population included: eight students, 11 staff members, one current principal and two former staff members. The data collection methods were: participant observations, interviews, focus groups, and documentation.

The principal informed me that Effective Schooling Research was used to form the foundation of this school. I postulated that data gathered would reflect these correlates. This indeed was the case; however, students' and staff members' lived experiences extended beyond effective schooling correlates.

I have identified five themes and strategies that, when employed, positively impacted the lives of students previously unsuccessful in traditional public schools. These findings included: Strong, Culturally Relevant, and Authentic African American Leadership; Effective Schooling Correlates; Culturally Relevant Interactions; Staff Members who were Warm Demanders; and Focusing on Non-Academic Needs.

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This dissertation is dedicated to Yeltsin, a 12th grade student participant of this study who died in a fatal car accident about six months after graduating from high school. Yeltsin was a profound thinker with an awareness of life and the world around him. During this study, I was able to see Yeltsin grow from a student who was totally resistant to attending college, to one who sat down with us to fill out a local community college application and scholarship forms.

One of my most memorable moments with Yeltsin was when he shared that he was scared he would not graduate from high school. Yeltsin did graduate that June, with plans to attend college and to become a social worker.

This book is dedicated to Yeltsin, his mother Minerva, brothers, and family. I feel so blessed that God allowed you to be in my life for the short time that you were here on earth.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

In September 2006, I began studying for the Graduate Record Exam at a local public library. After work, I would arrive at the library at 4:30 pm and stay until 8 pm. While studying, I noticed the same group of African American children frequenting the library until it closed each day. One day I watched as the teens gathered by the pop machine, and one of the boys laid on his stomach near it. This same boy reached inside the pop machine and began grabbing sodas for his friends. After he had pulled a few drinks down, I walked over to the teens and told them that as Black folks, we are often being watched and could not do things like this. It was illegal. The boys and girls were open to what I had to say and were honest sharing with me that they had no money but were thirsty.

On subsequent days, the youth would talk to me while I studied at the library. Their ages ranged from 10 to 14 years old; they were all close friends, lived near one another, and attended local public middle schools. The library was an environment where they could access the internet and socialize. Unfortunately, the youth were not being constructive with their time, and I began to notice that they attracted negative attention, likened to an overarching cloud of doom. They were followed by security guards and were threatened to be kicked out of the library. Their white peers were committing the same trespasses, yet were not reprimanded. Majority of these students were failing courses, had been placed in special education classes, and were given Individualized Educational Plans, thus placing them outside the world of a “normal” functioning student. The group of boys and girls continued to talk to me daily, sharing with me their scholastic problems. After visiting schools with their parents, I realized that this same cloud of negativity from the library appeared at school as well. Daily they would continue to talk to

me, a stranger, about wanting activities to be a part of, activities that their low grades often exempted them from participating in. These youth wanted to connect to something or someone positive in a society they believed had rejected them. They were only young boys and girls, yet they were ostracized from their peers, similar to adults who were criminals.

After my encounters with these youth, I decided to start a mentorship program that offered academic enrichment, cultural field trips, exposure to college, community service, and social events. I envisioned tutoring the students first, then having time for cultural and social events. At our first study session, these youth cried and refused to open their books. Before we could even open the books, we had to deal with emotional distress, identity crises, and other mental health concerns. These children and their parents shared with me their life experiences and challenges. Some of these students dealt with illness such as depression and bipolar disorder. They hated school and their teachers. Pursuing higher education seemed to be an unattainable goal. The girls articulated their highest aspirations as being back up dancers for rappers. The boys aspired to be “street pharmacists,” also known as drug dealers. They did not even believe that then-Senator Barack Obama could become our president because he was not a pop icon. Developing positive thoughts about their racial identity was key. And, over the course of a year and a half we, the college student mentors, had to address issues of low self-esteem, low self-efficacy, and self-hatred before schoolwork was handled.

I relay this story as an example of the types of children who were sent to the local alternative school discussed in my dissertation. This experience revealed to me how the schools they attended were unable to identify and correctly diagnose the needs of this population of students.

This qualitative study used a phenomenological approach to explore the lived experiences of students and staff in an alternative school where students persist, graduate from high school, and pursue higher institutions of education.

Purpose

The purpose of this study was to explore and gain a measure of understanding of the lived experiences (Van Manen, 1990) of students, administrators, teachers, and staff in an alternative school, where students previously identified as underachieving, and who had been displaced from traditional public schools, managed to persist through graduation and pursue higher education.

While the literature around alternative schools widely describes them as “dumping grounds” for misfits, incorrigibles, and expendable students (Dunbar, 2001), this study focused on an alternative school where students expelled from traditional public school learn how to survive and strive to, not only to earn a high school diploma, but also to attend college. In this study, I have identified five themes and strategies that, when employed, positively impacted the lives of students previously unsuccessful in traditional public schools. Attendance at this alternative school drastically changed the lives of youth once thought of as an expendable student population.

Research Questions

Primary Question

1. What occurs in this alternative school that supports students with behavior, academic, and truancy problems to persist, graduate from high school, and attend higher institutions of education?

Secondary Questions

2. How does the school's culture and climate support these students' matriculation through high school and further pursuit of institutions of higher education?
3. What are the students' and staff members' daily lived experiences in this alternative school?

The lived experiences of student and staff participants within the phenomenon of this alternative school were the focus of this study. The following questions served as a guide to unpack this study.

1. What led students to this school?
2. What interactions and practices were present within this school among staff and students?
3. What makes this particular alternative school different from traditional schools?
4. Has there been a change in students' perceptions of school, themselves, and their future since placement in this alternative school?

Anonymity

All names of students, staff and schools were changed to pseudonyms in order to protect the anonymity of participants. I used pseudonyms to identify this school (AHSDC) and this school district (Arcadia).

The School: AHSDC

Students attending AHSDC have been dismissed, removed, or have chosen to leave their traditional school in lieu of eventual expulsion for a variety of reasons, such as academic deficiencies, truancy, and/or behavioral problems.

In May 2011, I attended the Pulitzer Prize winning play "Fences," written by August Wilson and performed by AHSDC students. The play focused on African American life in the

1950s, and I was amazed at the talent, complexity, and excellent performance of these high school students. The principal spoke frankly to the audience about how this play was evidence that AHSDC was earning a positive reputation. He stated, “We [the school] are redefining ourselves.” The principal also shared that in their senior class of 15 students, 14 had been accepted into colleges, nine of them into four-year universities. Something different and extraordinary was happening in this school. Being thoroughly impressed, immediately following the play I approached the principal, introduced myself, and requested a meeting to discuss possibly writing my dissertation on his school.

Demographics in Arcadia School District

Arcadia school district was situated in a Midwestern college town that served 16,646 students, with 62.7 percent White; 15.9 percent Black; 5.4 percent Hispanic; 15.6 percent Asian/Pacific Islander and 0.4 percent American Indian/Native Alaskan. Twenty-one percent of the students were economically disadvantaged, and the district boasted sending two-thirds of their population to college. There were 33 schools; 20 elementary schools; five middle schools; three traditional high schools; and three alternative schools. There were also adult education and head start programs.

Arcadia’s Three Alternative Schools

After moving to the city where this alternative school is located, I heard various stories from colleagues and classmates regarding the hierarchy of local public schools. At the top were reputable schools, and at the bottom were two alternative schools that enrolled predominately African American students. These two alternative schools were the last stop for students who were failing academically or experiencing disciplinary problems, painting the picture of a school full of academic and social misfits. Negative stereotypes were so prevalent; I remember hearing

the story of students who had started a local mall fight, likened to a small riot. The primary students involved attended these particular alternative schools. Interestingly enough, there was a third alternative school never mentioned, a predominately-white, academically creative school that was the academic alternative to the mainstream public traditional school. This school also had its own history, discussed later in this study.

Significance: Voice of a Silenced Population

In research, the voices of marginalized individuals are often silenced (Dunbar, 2001). Researchers such as Dunbar (2001), Carter (2008), and Noguera (2003), within their studies, provide venues for students' and their parent's voices to be heard. The article *How Listening to Students Can Help Schools to Improve* (Noguera, 2007) states that student voices about their academic experiences can be used to inform reform efforts. This study supports this notion. Similarly, I believe that the voices of AHSDC students and staff members are provided a venue that acknowledges their expertise to unpack their lived experiences.

Limitations

This study focused on of a small sample of student and staff participants and their lived experiences. Although seen as a limitation, this smaller sample size helped to increase the depth of data and time individually spent with participants. Boyd (2001) stated that between two to 10 research participants are adequate to achieve data saturation. Phenomenological methods allowed me to collect in-depth descriptions and data. Lack of randomness is another limitation of phenomenological methods. However, Hycner (1985) wrote that it is important for the researcher "to seek out participants who not only have had the particular experience being investigated but also are able to articulate their experience" (p. 294).

Critics argue that qualitative, and specifically phenomenological, studies are not random, strongly reliable, or generalizable; however, phenomenology's language should not be placed in the same dialogue as other research. Morrisette (2011) stated that achieving trustworthiness is essential to qualitative research. Trustworthiness instead of validity was the model used to ensure rigor within this study.

CHAPTER 2

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK AND LITERATURE REVIEW

We can, whenever and wherever we choose, successfully teach all children whose schooling is of interest to us. We already know more than we need to do that. Whether or not we do it must finally depend on how we feel about the fact that we haven't so far. (Edmonds, 1979)

Effective Schooling

In the above quote, Edmonds (1979) expressed the sentiment that all students are not being educated effectively, creating marginalized students. Scholars and authors have addressed what effective teaching and schools look like (Ladson-Billings, 2009; Noguera, 2006; Perry, 2004). However, there still are great inequities within education. In my first interview with AHSDC's principal, Dr. E, he shared that Dr. Ronald Edmonds (1979) and Dr. Larry Lezotte (1991), of the "Effective School Movement," were scholars he admired. Effective school theory, also known as 90-90-90, includes seven correlates necessary for schools with 90 percent poverty and 90 percent minority to attain 90 percent achievement. These seven correlates include:

1. Clear and Focused School Mission
2. Safe and Orderly Environment
3. High Expectations/Expectation of success
4. Opportunity to Learn and Time on Task
5. Instructional Leadership
6. On-going Assessment/Frequent Monitoring of Student Progress
7. Positive Home-School Relations (Lezotte, 1991, pp. 1-6).

Dr. E implemented Effective Schooling Theory in AHSDC daily as an evaluation and framework method. Though these seven correlates are not specific to alternative schools,

I used this theory as I analyzed data as the primary lens for examining participants' lived experiences.

LITERATURE REVIEW

This section summarizes the literature in relation to alternative schools and to the specific findings from this study. Alternative education history as well as my observations and experiences from AHSDC will be reflected through my scholarly literature review. This literature review is organized into four sections:

1. Alternative Schools: History
2. Achievement Gap in Arcadia School District
3. Problems of AHSDC Students
4. Lived Experiences, Practices, and Interactions in AHSDC

Alternative Schools: History

History and Evolution of Alternative Schools

Spring (2005) stated that alternative schools have existed for over 150 years. The first alternative schools were created by Catholics in the mid-19th century in opposition to common schools created by Protestants. In the early 1950s, curriculum content was a topic of controversy as progressive educators believed different schools of thought should be represented within education. Progressive education was divided into three branches:

1. Social reconstruction
2. Social efficiency
3. Child center pedagogy (Newman, 2003, p.11).

After World War II, an emerging theme was to build alternative schools in opposition to large, oppressive, bureaucratic high schools (Brown & Beckett, 2007). There are no clear

definitions of alternative schools, because they have evolved and changed over time. The 1960s and 1970s fostered a social movement where receiving a quality education was believed to increase opportunity (Kim & Taylor, 2008). Duke & Smith (1974) noted that alternative schools could also be labeled as schools “accessible not by assignment but instead by choice,” and as special function schools. In the 1980s, alternative schools moved toward serving youth with disruptive behavior and academic deficiencies (Neumann, 2003).

Alternative Schools Categorized

The term alternative school arguably holds various meanings, depending on the population, geographic region, and purpose (Arnove & Strout, 1978). Raywid (1994) organized alternative schools as falling into three categories based on purposes: choice, sentencing, or remediation of students. She categorized alternative schools further by their structural mission: changing the school, changing the institutional system, or changing the student (Raywid, 1999). The National Center for Educational Statistics (2009) defined alternative schools and programs as interventions to assist the needs of students not being met in traditional schools.

Gaps in the Alternative High School Literature

Three decades ago was a very different time and place in America. When reviewing the alternative school literature, there were gaps in examining the positive outcomes and the cultural environment for alternative students of color. Prior quantitative alternative school studies have concentrated on alternative schools’ structure and organization, including aspects such as demographics, attendance, graduation rates, and test scores of students (Lange & Sletten, 1995). Quantitative studies reported aspects of successful schools, including flexibility, small student-teacher ratio, family-like atmospheres, and high expectations (Dugger & Dugger, 1998; Gold & Mann, 1984). Pioneering alternative school studies have focused on White working-class student

populations with behavioral problems (Gold & Mann, 1984), or on students with disabilities (Benz et al, 2000 & Mader, 1992). More recently, various phenomenological and ethnographic alternative school studies have examined school leadership, teacher and student interaction, and overall attitudes of students toward schooling (Chalker & Brown, 1999; Morrisette, 2011; Stevens et al, 1991). There have also been earlier qualitative studies showing alternative school atmospheres that perpetuated inequities by further marginalizing students of color into separate spaces (Dunbar, 2001). Morrisette (2011) wrote that more ongoing research on alternative schools is necessary, so that “differences in culture and age may be explored” (p. 186).

AHSDC: Past Study

Khalifa (2008) wrote his dissertation on this same school: AHSDC. His findings included that culturally relevant leadership was necessary for student achievement in this type of school. The founding principal, Mr. Joe, held direct and simultaneous connections to the teachers, parents/guardians, communities, school culture, and students, unlike other schools, where principals were only connected to the teachers and not to parents/guardians, community, or students. Khalifa also found that culturally relevant leadership included a close relationship between the school and community; acceptance of the cultural and social capital of students; and a high level of trust and rapport.

This Study

For this study, AHSDC falls into the category of Raywid’s category of *sentencing and remediation and changing the school and changing the student* (1994; 1999). The lived experiences explored in this study further explain why these definitions are applicable for this school. In this state there are more than 270 alternative programs serving about 25,000 students (Lange and Sletten, 2002).

Achievement Gap in Arcadia School District

AHSDC was housed in the Arcadia School District, one that had had a steep racial academic achievement gap for over 30 years. Many students who fell into that gap and had experienced failure were sent to AHSDC to improve their academic outcomes. Most of AHSDC's students were African American. AHSDC defines itself as a school that diminishes the academic achievement gap.

For the past 20 years, the term "achievement gap" has become one of the most commonly used catchphrases in education. This term refers to academic outcomes and test score discrepancies between students of color (Native American, African American, and Latino) and their Caucasian and certain Asian-American peers (Howard, 2010; Paige & Witty, 2010).

Achievement Gap Literature

African Americans score significantly lower than their Caucasian counterparts on standardized tests in math, reading, and vocabulary. Howard (2010) wrote that African American youth, though they have comparable abilities to their Caucasian classmates in verbal memory, score far below white students. These testing gaps exist throughout fourth, eighth, and 12th grades. For example, in 2005, 32 percent to 40 percent of fourth-grade African American and Latino students were below the basic level of proficiency on the National Assessment of Educational Test in math. When examining proficiency for this same test research, findings showed that only 12 percent of Black eighth graders and 14 percent of Latino students attained proficiency in math, while White students achieved 35 percent proficiency. Over 54 percent to 58 percent of Latino and African American students were below basic proficiency in reading.

Authors Jencks and Phillips (1989) stated that the existing test gap is not genetic or biological, but instead stems from socially constructed obstacles and impediments. Noguera and

Wing (2006) noted that the achievement gap is an issue of institutionalized inequalities present in schools. Factors such as racism, power, oppression, and classism are rarely recognized or acknowledged.

Academic Achievement Gap Outcomes

This academic achievement gap has various outcomes for underachieving Black and Latino students that include dropping out, delinquent behavior and expulsion, lower enrollment rates into honors courses, lower test scores, lower grade point averages, lower graduation rates, higher rates of suspension, and higher referrals into special education (Dunbar, 1998; Howard, 2010; Jencks & Phillips, 1989; Noguera, 2003; Paige & Witty, 2010).

Paige and Witty (2010) wrote the following concerns about the achievement gap:

1. Strengthens the “Blacks are intellectually inferior” stereotype
2. Slows down the accumulation of African American wealth; and
3. Leads to more African Americans without health insurance, in prison and dying early.

(pp. 45-57)

Problems of AHSDC Students

The principal at AHSDC, Dr. E, mentioned that the two main problems of entering students were apathy and poor work ethic. AHSDC student participants during interviews recalled the racism, tracking, special education placements, language discrimination, and disciplinary practices they experienced in traditional schools before being dismissed. These students entered AHSDC having experienced negative interactions in school, and were disengaged and resistant toward school.

Examples of Inequitable Practices in Arcadia School District

Presently in schools, institutionalized racism is manifested in the form of tracking, inaccurate and misused assessments, lack of academic rigor, lowered teacher expectations, stereotypes, staff members who practice color blindness, lack of funding and comparable resources, and unjust exposure and disciplinary practices. These practices of discipline, tracking, and special education referrals and color blind practices shape students' experiences (Dunbar, 2001; Ferguson, 2002; Harry & Klingner, 2006; Kohl, 1994; Mabokela & Madsen, 2005). These inequitable practices were identified in Arcadia School District by students and staff members.

Tracking

Noguera and Wing (2006) identified invisible and institutionalized structures that lead to educational inequalities. They discussed how the quality of learning and teaching are inequitable in different tracks. Courses classified as college bound and advanced are more demanding, are orderly, and teachers support students toward higher expectations. However, classes that are on a lower track are less orderly, are less demanding and the teachers have mediocre expectations of students. For each track, students are aware of the expectations from their teachers and of the upward mobility or limitations placed upon their lives.

Special Education: Race and Language

"Disability has functioned historically to justify inequality for disabled people themselves, but it has also done so for women and minority groups....The concept of disability has been used to justify discrimination against other groups by attributing disability to them." (Baynton, 2001, p. 33). In Harry and Klingner's study, they found that minority youth were at higher risk of being placed in special education programs than White students (2006). Black students were the most overrepresented marginalized group in nearly every state in each special

education category (Losen and Orfield, 2002). Artiles et al. (2002) found elementary and secondary grades English language learners were overrepresented in special education due to lack of empowering bilingual support programs.

Disciplinary Practices

Ferguson (2002) examined the disciplinary practices of Black males in an urban school. In her study, students were identified as good/gifted or bad/troubled, and they were disciplined more harshly if they fell in the latter category. This particular school served as a pipeline for students entering the penal system. Common disciplinary policies that remove disruptive students from schools to achieve a safer environment often hold unintended consequences, such as decreased life chances and limited upward mobility for the expelled students. These consequences are often felt by students of color, especially Latino and African American youth (Dunbar and Villarruel, 2002).

The literature reports that Black males in particular are placed in alternative schools at high rates (Dunbar, 1998; 2001). The Theory of Disciplinary Power examines how punishment in school is used as a method of social control. Radical Schooling Theory states that schools can serve as institutions of ranking and sorting to solidify society's hierarchies (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1974; Foucault, 1979). Since schools are microcosms of larger society, beliefs about superiority and inferiority are attached to race, gender, and class. Failure is often normalized for minority groups within academic institutions (Noguera, 2003).

I Won't Learn From You

Commonly in schools, staff members employ color-blind practices when dealing with students (Mabokela & Madsen, 2005). Kohl (1994) discussed an internal conflict that youth of color face being educated in inequitable structures while trying to remain true to their culture and

their neighborhood. His research concluded that students have been led to believe that being Black or Latino means rejecting White structures of education. In doing this, students shun those who have become educated within these structures, and they define those individuals as sell-outs. In such an environment that compromises a student's worth, identity, self-respect, and cultural loyalty, students find ways to cope. A way of coping is the willful decision to not-learn, which is defined as a rejection of education.

It is important to note the type of students that Arcadia school district “dumped” into AHSDC; 88 percent were students of color; 65 percent received free or reduced lunch; 90 percent were behavioral at-risk; and 49 percent had IEPs (Individual Educational Plans).

Lived Experiences, Practices and Interactions in AHSDC School

There are studies that have examined model programs and practices where alternative students and minority students are experiencing success (Edmonds, 1979; Epstein, 2001; Ladson-Billings, 2009; Lezotte, 1991; Noguera, 2008; Pressley et al., 2009). The following are theories and practices that were evident from interviews, focus groups, and participant observations of the lived experiences of students and staff at AHSDC.

Effective Schooling Correlates

The “Effective School Movement,” included seven correlates necessary in 90-90-90 schools. These were schools with 90 percent poverty and 90 percent minorities, yet intent on attaining 90 percent student achievement. These seven correlates included clear and focused school mission, safe and orderly environment, high expectations, opportunity to learn, time on task, instructional leadership, frequent monitoring of student progress, and positive home-school relations (Edmonds, 1979; Lezotte, 1991).

Strong, Culturally Relevant and Authentic African American Leadership

Pressley et al. (2004) found the following traits were necessary to educate Black students successfully: accountability, academic focus, orderliness, and strong leadership. In an ethnographic study, Khalifa (2008) found that a close relationship between the school and community, acceptance of the cultural and social capital of students, and a high level of trust and rapport was necessary from school leadership to increase the success of students. Black principals in various studies showed leadership in the following areas: a form of caring; empowerment for students, high standards for students and staff, and compassion and understanding for black youth and their communities (Brown & Beckett 2007; Lomotey, 1989). Paige and Witty (2010) created the term Authentic African American Leadership -- defining it as a leader who works for social change and justice to help diminish the racial academic achievement gap. This specific title of leadership is open to all races, not just African American principals.

Community and Family Partnerships

Epstein (2001) wrote that as a student progresses in school years, parent/teacher partnerships decrease greatly. There are three main spheres -- student, parent/guardian, and teachers -- and there is a great need for overlapping all three spheres simultaneously. Thus there is a need for greater overlap of students and parent partnerships, and the greater the overlap, the greater potential for student success.

Culturally Relevant Interactions

Ladson-Billings (2009) introduced cultural relevancy: a pedagogy that empowers students politically, emotionally, intellectually, and socially by using cultural references to impart skills and knowledge. Using cultural relevancy helps educators acknowledge the culture

of their students and be aware of their stereotypical perceptions, while using the child's culture as a reference and point of empowerment.

Warm Demanders

Educators who care about their students yet insist that they meet disciplinary and academic expectations are known as Warm Demanders. The term was first coined by Kleinfeld (1972) to describe a teacher who effectively taught Indian and Eskimo youth through active demandingness and personal warmth. Components of being a warm demander include building deliberate relationships; learning about students' culture; communicating expectations of success; insisting beyond believing; providing learning support; supporting positive behavior; and creating clear and consistent expectations (Bondy & Ross, 2008; Ross, Bondy, Gallingane & Hambacher, 2008).

Addressing Non-Academic Concerns

Noguera (2003) argued that in urban and high-poverty areas, high stakes testing and accountability are not enough to address the achievement gap of these youth. Instead, social and economic factors affect students, such as chronic respiratory conditions, mental health, lack of resources, instability of residential housing, violence, and substance abuse. Other issues include parental unemployment, hunger, stress, and inadequate clothing. Foster (1997) stated that it is important to teach to the whole child, which includes emotional, social, cultural, as well as the academic well-being of the student.

CHAPTER 3

RESEARCH METHODS AND DESIGN

This chapter describes the methodology chosen to understand the lived experiences of students and staff at AHSDC. The interview questions were designed to allow participants to share their experiences at AHSDC.

Qualitative Research Rationale

I used a qualitative approach to understand how participants constructed their experiences in their space (Merriam, 2002). I sought to understand why students who attended this alternative school persisted, graduated, and attended institutions of higher education.

I used a qualitative inquiry approach that was “richly descriptive” by displaying pictures and words, rather than using numbers to convey findings (Merriam, 2002, p. 4-5). The alternative education literature is consistent with negative accounts (Dunbar, 1999) or it describes the experiences of white working-class youth in alternative schools (Gold & Mann, 1984). Yet there is not much written about minority-filled alternative schools that help students get on track, graduate, and pursue higher education. This study uncovers this phenomenon that tells the story of one such place, the story of AHSDC.

Phenomenological Approach

I used a phenomenological approach because this method provides deeper descriptions and insightful understandings of experiences (Groenewald, 2004). My unit of analysis was this alternative school, and I focused on the students and staff who attended and worked, respectively, within this school. Phenomenology was an appropriate approach that allowed me to gather rich data that supported my understanding of how and why this alternative school helped to transform the lives of negatively labeled and disposable student populations.

During the interviews I asked open-ended questions, to allow the participants to share meaningful stories of their experiences in their own words. I captured the “rich description of phenomena” (Kensit, 2000, p. 104). I used methods such as in-depth participant observations and interviews of the principal, staff, and students (Wong et al., 2001), to understand better the phenomenon of this alternative school. Through participant observations, I took an extended look into the lives of people at this school, and I immersed myself in the environment while collecting data through formal and informal dialogue. Interviewees, through their rich descriptive details of their experiences within this phenomenon, gave nuances that brought me, as the researcher, into their lived world (Morrissette, 2011).

Site Selection

After attending a play put on by the students titled “Fences,” I was amazed at the talent, complexity, and excellence of these high school students’ performances. The principal spoke frankly to the audience about how this play was evidence that this school was now earning a positive reputation. At the conclusion of the play, the principal told the audience that 14 of the school’s 15 graduating seniors would be attending college, and nine of those students would be attending four-year universities. I chose AHSDC to conduct this study because this school district had a complex history with a steep achievement gap. Some students were extremely successful, while others were not.

The Arcadia School District is situated in a Midwestern college city where there are three alternative schools, three traditional high schools, and one high school nearby that also serves as a feeder school. The founder/principal, Mr. Joe, located this school on the outskirts of town, away from other traditional schools, housing complexes, low-income housing, and local bus lines. Mr. Joe’s strategic beliefs were that physical distance would decrease student truancy,

skipping classes, and other distractions. Students were bused to the school by public school transportation.

AHSDC served 9th -12th graders, predominately students of color. In the first 20 years of this school's existence, 8th grade students were accepted. The school has a teaching ratio of six students to one teacher, and each classroom has no more than 15 students. According to the 2010-2011 data from greatschools.org, 65 percent of students were eligible for free lunch, five percent were eligible for reduced lunch, and 90 percent were academically and/or behaviorally at-risk.

The actual numerical demographics of this school included 98 enrolled students. However, racial demographics maintained fluid categories, so an individual who identified as an African American and a Native American would be represented in both categories. These fluid categories do impact the numbers represented, making it seem like there were 124 students enrolled. However, there were only 98 students enrolled. The racial numerical categories represented were: 70 Black/African Americans; 20 White/Caucasians; 10 Hispanic/Latino; six Hawaiian Pacific Islanders; 10 Asians; and eight American Indians. The school is comprised of 55 percent males and 45 percent females. At the beginning of each trimester, students leave (graduate or return to their traditional school) and new students are admitted. Yet the total population stays around 100 students (see Appendix A).

Research Participants

There were eight AHSDC students, 11 staff members, one current principal and two former staff members who participated in the study.

Introduction of Principal

AHSDC has an African American male principal who students affectionately call Dr. E. Dr. E assumed leadership after the principal/founder Mr. Joe retired in 2008, after more than 30 years of service. Although the former principal, Mr. Joe, was loved by most, he was disliked by a few for his outspoken demeanor. The school, in its first two decades, gained a reputation for successfully assisting suspended/expelled students in earning a high school diploma.

Starting out as a strict disciplinarian and proponent of tough love, during the first twenty years Mr. Joe became lax in respecting discipline, and instead became more "grandfatherly in his interaction with students. Some students took advantage of his lessening of discipline, and they began to behave inappropriately. Innately the result was academic decline, increased truancy, fights, and other serious problems. At the urging of some staff members and after personal reflection, Mr. Joe decided to retire, and he asked a younger principal, Dr. E, to take over leadership. Dr. E was handpicked by Mr. Joe to become his successor.

Dr. E previously worked as a traditional middle school principal in this same school district and had a reputation of being able to turn challenging schools into institutions where students achieved academically. Through his leadership, Dr. E led AHSDC off the State High Priority list, raised the overall GPA from 1.7 to 2.5 in the first trimester, and reduced students' absences from over 700 to less than 300 within the first trimester.

Educators/Staff

AHSDC additionally had 11 subject teachers, two liaisons, two teacher consultants, one part-time social worker, one administrative assistant, one volunteer foster grandparent, one lunch lady, and two custodians. Of these staff members, eight were Black, 10 were White, one was Multiracial and two were Hispanic.

Most educators had 10 or more years of experience and had worked at AHSDC for three or more years. I extended an open invitation during a staff meeting to interview interested teachers/staff from various disciplines. I interviewed 11 current staff members. The founding principal, Mr. Joe, and a former parent/volunteer, Ms. Swan, were also interviewed, to provide the background of AHSDC. Table 1 lists specific information about the 11 staff members interviewed.

Table 1. Staff Participants

Pseudonym	Discipline	Years in Education	Race	Gender	Years at AHSDC
Ms. Lana	English Lit/African American Lit	28	African American/Black	Female	18
Mr. Shaw	Natural Science	28	Caucasian/White	Male	28
Ms. Brenda	Community Liaison	14	African American/Black	Female	19
Ms. Adrienne	Natural Science	12	Caucasian/White	Female	11
Ms. Tracee	Math	15	African American/Black	Female	3
Mr. Clark	History	16	Caucasian/White	Male	3
Mr. Turner	Math	13	African American/Black	Male	3
Mr. Carlos	Social worker	6	African American/Black	Male	1
Mr. Klein	PE/Health	11	African American/Black	Male	7
Ms. Karla	Counselor Liaison	30	Caucasian/White	Female	30
Mr. Ray	English/Reading Recovery	12	African American/Mexican	Male	3

Students

All students at AHSDC had been expelled from traditional public schools, were referred to the school or had recently requested placement at the school in lieu of expulsion. Numerous parents from Sheldon Middle School, where Dr. E was formerly the principal, wanted their children to follow him to AHSDC. Sheldon Middle School parents knew and appreciated that Dr. E was a principal who cared about students, held high expectations, and had a no-nonsense stance toward inappropriate and deviant behavior.

AHSDC housed 88 percent students of color and 70 percent students on free and reduced lunch. They did not come from wealthy families. Initially, most students did not want to attend AHSDC. They held perceptions that the school was a space for “bad or dumb” students. The majority of students also held defensive and resistant attitudes toward school because they had been expelled by or felt pushed out of traditional schooling. However, within a year, according to Dr. E, most students became acclimated to the staff and school culture and appreciated the discipline and structure of AHSDC, thus seeing this school as a second home.

Student Participation Requirement

During a conversation with Dr. E about how to select student participants, he suggested that the following factors be considered when selecting students as participants in this study.

1. A minimum of two trimesters attended at AHSDC
2. Regular attendance records
3. Articulation in an open manner.

Dr. E explained that generally it took at least two trimesters for students to become acclimated to a school and to provide meaningful feedback. He stated that students who had attendance problems would not be responsible enough to participate and did not deserve that

privilege. Then finally, students who had displayed honest interactions could participate, meaning students were honest about what they were feeling (good or bad). Dr. E thought that it was important to have students who were able to articulate their lived experiences, whether they were negative or positive. Dr. E, Mrs. Brenda (community liaison), and Ms. Gabriella (administrative assistant) gave me a list of 8 students who met these standards. All these students, with the exception of one, agreed to participate.

Below in Table 2 are the eight students who expressed interest and met the criteria (with the exception of Tonya). Tonya did not meet the attendance requirement; however, she asked Dr. E for permission to participate, and he told her to ask me. I appreciated her enthusiasm and initiative and allowed her to join the study.

Table 2. Student Participants

Pseudonym	Race	Gender	Grade	Age	GPA entering AH/4.0 scale	Reason for entry
Helena	African American/mixed	Female	10 th	16	1.889	Truancy Skipping Disruptive Behavior Low Grades
Tonya	African American/Black	Female	11 th	17	1.7	Truancy Skipping Low Grades
Jocelyn	African American/Black	Female	12 th	18	0.922	Truancy Skipping Low Grades
Nina	Latino/Hispanic	Female	11 th	17	2.0	Truancy Skipping Low grades

Table 2 (cont'd)

Martin	African American/Black	Male	12 th	18	Entered 8 th grade	Low Grades Disruptive Behavior
Yeltsin	Latino/Hispanic	Male	12 th	18	0.970	Truancy Skipping Low Grades Disruptive Behavior
Raynard	African American/Black	Male	11 th	17	0.27	Truancy Skipping Low Grades Disruptive Behavior
Jack	Caucasian/White	Male	10 th	16	Entered 8 th grade	Truancy Skipping Low Grades Substances

Timeline

I collected data for 12 months, two to four times a week for four to six hours a day. The first month consisted of observations and participant observations. I spent six months conducting interviews and focus groups, four months conducting more participant observations and classroom observations, and the final two months in follow up interviews. When the school board threatened to close AHSDC, participant observation hours extended to after-school activities, including evening budget meetings and board meetings. As a community member, I attended these meetings with students and staff. We wanted to voice our displeasure with the inequities entrenched in the school board's proposed budget cuts.

Sources of Data

There were four main sources of data collected: participant observations, interviews, focus groups, and documents. The same eight students participated in the interviews and focus groups. Staff members were only interviewed.

Participant Observations

During my initial visits, I became familiar with the school's students, staff, and atmosphere. As a participant observer, I was immersed in this alternative school and its daily activities. Daily activities included weekly rap sessions/assemblies, sitting in on family/teacher/student meetings, and verbally participating in classroom discussions during observation. As an educator and counselor, I involved myself in student and staff members' daily interactions. I helped students with their assignments, talked during rap sessions and class observations, and assisted students who excused themselves from class for a time out when they were feeling overwhelmed with personal or academic concerns.

Field Notes

As a participant observer, I kept private field notes of daily academic pursuits throughout the school (Babbie, 1992). As a participant observer, I was present in everyday settings, which enhanced my data (Glesne, 1999). I was immersed in the setting, its people, and the research questions (Babbie, 1992). Field notes were taken during staff organizational meetings, extra-curricular activities, school assemblies, classroom instruction, staff meetings, disciplinary actions, award ceremonies, lunchtime, and principal/parent meetings.

Interviews

At the heart of interviewing were the participants' stories because their stories held value (Seidman, 2006). I framed my interview questions to capture the participants' feelings,

experiences, and convictions about their educational experiences prior to and during their attendance at AHSDC (Appendices, B and C).

I conducted face-face interviews; the interviews were conversational. Student interviews were relaxed, and Black English/Ebonics was often used. All interviews used a phenomenological approach that centered on the lived world of the interviewee, while also being sensitive to the interviewee (Kvale, 1984).

Student Interview Models

I used Seidman's (2006) model when interviewing students, because this model explored the wholeness of participants' experiences:

1. Interview One: Focus on life history
2. Interview Two: The details of experience
3. Interview Three: Reflection on the meanings

In Depth Understanding of Student Participants

To avoid interruption of instructional class time, at the request of the principal, I interviewed students during lunch hours. The lunch hour for students varied from 30 to 45 minutes. I initially planned six interviews for each student. However, when pressure came to close down AHSDC (to be expounded on at a later time), students used their lunch hours to organize to save their school. I was able to sit in on these student planning meetings and to collect observational data. Consequently, four interviews were conducted per student that lasted between two and three hours total, depending on students' availability. The student interviews were conducted in the AHSDC's main office's conference room.

Principal and Staff Interview Protocol

It was important to this study that I gain an understanding of the principal's educational and leadership philosophies, school structure, daily pursuits, and interactions with students, parents/guardians, and staff members. Therefore I conducted seven in-depth interviews for 45 minutes to one hour with the principal. I interviewed 11 educators/staff members once for 60 minutes, to gain perspective on their practices and on student interactions at AHSDC.

Through interviewing the principal, staff members, and students (three different informants), I triangulated data in order to assess the trustworthiness of this study (Holloway, 1997). All interviews were audio recorded and then transcribed verbatim. Focus groups were videotaped and transcribed.

Students' Focus Groups

I conducted two focus groups for the eight student participants, to provide space for individuals "who share a similar background...to engage in meaningful conversations" (Given, 2008, p. 352) regarding their experiences at AHSDC. The individual interviews provided background information for forming effective focus groups (Given, 2008). Focus groups were conducted in the school's media center during the first hour. Each respective focus group followed the student's individual interviews. I conducted individual interviews first in order to inform the focus group activities/discussions and to build rapport with students so that they felt comfortable talking to me.

During the focus groups, creative and non-traditional methods were used to encourage participant dialogue. For example, during the first focus group, students participated in a stereotype activity where they discussed how stereotypes have affected their traditional schooling experiences. During the second focus group, students shared the event that brought

them to AHSDC, and they made a list of words/phrases describing the school. These activities were done to encourage brainstorming and to increase their comfort level with one another (Appendix, D).

Organization of Data Collection for Student Interviews and Focus Groups

There were three themes for collecting data from students. Below are the themes of each data collection wave:

1. Their lived experiences prior to arriving at this alternative school
2. Their lived experiences within this alternative school
3. Making meaning of these lived experiences.

Data collection from each of these eight students was conducted in the following manner, based on the above themes/topics:

Table 3. Students' Interviews and Focus Groups

1st Topic	Lived experiences prior to arriving at AHSDC	Individual interview #1	Focus Group #1	Individual Interview #2
2nd Topic	Lived experiences within this alternative school	Individual Interview #3	Focus Group #2	
3rd Topic	Making meaning of these lived experiences	Final Interview #4		

Documentation

School districts create documentation useful to research (Brogdan & Biklen, 1982). I used open archival and open published documents (Holloway, 1997), including past and present newspaper articles. I utilized newspaper articles referencing this school's conception and the district's racial achievement gap. Official school documentation, such as student referral information and transcripts, were collected. This information aided in the background story of the students as well as their present academic progress.

Permission and Forms

The consent and assent forms stated that participants and guardians agreed to release their past and present academic records. Student participants received permission and assent forms to participate in this study. At the beginning of the study, students completed an introductory survey of personal information, such as identity markers, residence address (SES measurements), contact phone numbers, and academic goals.

Categories of Data Analysis

Data collected from personal interviews, student focus groups, documentation, and participant observations were all coded for common themes. Data analysis was done on an on-going basis (Taylor & Bogdan, 1998). When analyzing data, Giorgi's (1975) methods were followed for interviews:

1. I transcribed participant interviews verbatim, keeping each participant's interview(s) separate to understand their individual experiences. I read through the interview transcripts several times for deepening my understandings of the participants.
2. I reviewed each participant's transcript(s) and pulled out meaningful phrases, words, and comments that illuminated their experiences at AHSDC.

3. I took these meaningful phrases, words, and comments from individual participant interviews/experiences and compiled a large combined list of the same from all interview transcripts. From this combined list, a story about this school emerged and started to become clear.
4. I took this combined list of meaningful phrases and condensed these repeated ideas into consistent and collective experiences. A story emerged. I then took those consistent and collective experiences and placed them into collective themes within theoretical constructs. These constructs were the shared lived experiences at this school.

Narrative Analysis

I used the Stevick-Colaizzi Keen method (Moustakas, 1994) in order to analyze participant observations of activities, focus groups, and events. This method included the following:

1. I took handwritten participant observational notes and typed them out.
2. These typed notes were organized to include settings, descriptions of event, and the participants involved.
3. From each event I included the verbal and non-verbal interactions of participants.
4. I explored and described the participants' interactions with me.
5. I reflected on possible meanings of the events, including my interactions. I began to make meaning of these observations.
6. I constructed a summary of the collective outcomes and essence of the events in my own words. I included participants' words and their reflections on the events.

Trustworthiness

Seidman (2006, p. 23) stated, “Many qualitative researchers disagree with the aspects of this epistemological assumptions underlying the notion of validity.” I substitute the notion of “trustworthiness” for that of validity (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Nut and Morrow (2009) stated that if a researcher cannot articulate clearly one's study findings and why they matter, the study is not trustworthy. Aspects of trustworthiness include credibility, dependability, conformability, and transferability.

The process of member checking was done to ensure the interpretation correctness for those voicing their experiences/stories. Follow-up questions were asked if the information given by participants was unclear or could be interpreted in various ways (Merriam, 1998). To achieve triangulation and overlapping in data collection, I used the following: interviews with the principal, interviews with educators/staff members, interviews with students, past and present transcripts, alternative school referral information, student focus groups, focus group activities, submitted academic assignments, rubrics/classroom assignments, field trips and participant observations.

Presentation of Data

“The interpretive process cannot be denied within phenomenology and is central to the data analysis process” (Morrissette, 2011, p.172). This means that meaningful story sharing and description was used throughout this study. In subsequent chapters, I present findings and themes as an interpretation of stories in narrative form. I provide a brief biographical sketch of each participant's life (Dunbar, 1998), and these biographies are included in Chapter 4. I want to enable the reader to understand the participants, whom they have never met (Richardson, 1990).

I discuss emerging themes and verbatim statements to construct a picture of the lived experiences of the principal, staff, and students at AHSDC.

Reflexivity, Race and Roles

Reflexivity, meaning how I identify myself and view myself in society, is an essential component to discuss. As an educator and social worker with a passion for helping students of color, I understood that I could not detach myself from my presuppositions. I held beliefs that were explicit (Morrisette, 2011). As a black female, raised by educators and being a trained social worker, an advocate and a community organizer, I hold strong feelings toward students of color placements in alternative schools. However, I utilized bracketing which allowed me to be aware of and acknowledge my own bias and characterization of alternative schools. When my own bias arose, I went to the data for answers (see Appendix E).

As the youngest child of two educators with high social capital, I was often shielded from the institutional practices of racism in schools. Around the dinner table, I would often hear how my parents were advocating and effectively teaching black students in their classrooms, students who had previously been labeled as failures. Although shielded from inequities within school, outside the school's walls, I was not totally protected from racial encounters and discrimination. A simple trip to the bowling alley with friends could easily yield problems with the police for no reason except there being what someone thought were too many Black teenagers.

I do believe the following greatly impacted the way AHSDC students positively interacted with and trusted me:

1. Dr. E, who was trusted by students and staff, publically verbalized his support in and of me.
2. I am an African American female who works with youth and as a counselor for a living.

In student interviews, it was more a conversation, where I would talk with them comfortably about their experiences. I asked broad questions to students, and they fully answered, giving background and personal experiences as well. As we talked about racism, I noticed that some students of color would become upset when discussing the discrimination they had experienced. They would say things like “you know what I mean,” or “let me stop before I get angry,” so probing was often necessary.

Attack on AHSDC

The last week of April, less than two months before school ended, the new superintendent of Arcadia introduced budget cut proposals. This proposal included closing AHSDC, yet no other alternative or traditional school was on this cutting block. The plan was either to consolidate AHSDC with another alternative school, or to return AHSDC students to the same traditional schools that had failed them, by placing 1/3 of the students in each building. AHSDC students would be segregated in a separate wing. As a result, this occurrence is discussed at greater length in Chapter 6.

Due to the superintendent’s and the school board’s proposal to close down AHSDC, students, staff, parents/guardians, the community and I bonded in solidarity to ensure this school stayed open. I would not have gotten to know or work closely with the majority of students, parents/guardians and community members who were not participants in the study had this ordeal not occurred.

Ethical Considerations

Instead of solely benefiting from this study, I sought to provide participants a space to tell their story. “We have been studied to death...if you want something dead...research it.” (Dunbar Jr., 2008, p. 91). My research was not intended to oppress, silence, or suppress the voice

or spirit of the individuals interviewed. My research served to give a venue for and illuminate the voices of participants and their experiences.

Michigan State University's Human Subjects Review board has a high and extensive process for implementing an ethical study; thus, all methods, consent forms, procedures, and information have been approved by the Institutional Review Board, and they were rigorously followed. Students and staff involved in the study signed consent forms (those under 18 years of age were given a parental/guardian permission form). Consent and assent forms stated that participants and guardians agreed to a release of their past and present academic records. Participants were told that they could remove themselves from the study at any time. However, no participant removed themselves. The names of all participants were pseudonyms. Participants were debriefed at the end of the study.

CHAPTER 4

OVERVIEW OF SCHOOL, STAFF MEMBERS, AND STUDENTS

This chapter shares the narratives of AHSDC students and staff. Participants had a story that informed their experiences at AHSDC. This chapter provides background of their lived experiences. Data was analyzed using a phenomenological approach, in which verbatim transcripts were essential in capturing the essence of experience. Quotes were also used in the forthcoming participant narratives (Husserl, 1931; Morrisette, 2010). This chapter introduces study participants and site/setting.

Arcadia School District's High Schools

There are three alternative schools in the Arcadia District: AHSDC, Saddle Alternative, and Cillside Alternative High. AHSDC serves a majority of black students. Saddle Alternative High serves pregnant girls, and dropouts, offers the General Educational Development test and online classes. Cillside Alternative High serves a majority white students; it is less restrictive and has increased independence. There are three traditional feeder high schools into AHSDC: Hamilton, Prescott, and Statue High (the latter was recently built). In addition, there is one traditional high school outside of the Arcadia District, called Yellowstone High. This out-of-district school pays AHSDC to take their troubled students. Ms. Brenda, the community liaison, stated that \$150,000, from per pupil allocations, had been collected yearly through this partnership with Yellowstone High School.

The History of AHSDC

School Background

As mentioned earlier, in the early 1970s there was a knife fight between black and white students at a local middle school. This school's district, fearing more fights, proposed an

alternative school and contacted Mr. Joe, who was working at a Catholic school in a nearby inner city. They asked him to assume responsibility as principal of this new alternative school. Starting with five youth and increasing steadily in population, for almost 20 years AHSDC students met in trailers, where rain and cold weather affected their daily learning. Mr. Joe held a press conference and after parents, educators, and students petitioned the school board, millions of dollars were given to AHSDC to build a new, adequate school building. Mr. Joe became known as the principal who took the worst of students, connected with their families, and ensured they received their high school diploma. He also formed a national day to increase black parental involvement in schools. Below are accounts of staff and parents who were involved in the school's conception and foundation.

Founding principal, Mr. Joe, recounted the steps taken to receive an equitable building:

I told them [board] I'd come out here because if I stayed in town they'd be checking on me, you know? I come out here, ain't nobody gonna fuck with me. So I started calling them about when are you going to fix this up, you know? I'll call a press conference. We had about 10 or 12 kids and they would come in they would stay, they wouldn't want to go [back to traditional school]. So you know it was good because we did whatever we wanted to meet the needs of the kids. We picked them up 'cause the bus drivers wouldn't take them. I raised hell and finally they said we'll build you a new school right behind the old school [portable trailers]. –Mr. Joe, founding principal

Ms. Swan, former parent, remembered that the activism for a new building lasted 10 years:

The same thing you do for these other schools and these other kids you don't do for AHSDC? That's neglect and child abuse and discrimination. You remember we had those portables out there? Kids used to have to sit [mimics sitting sideways]. It would be so cold, kids would be sitting there huddled up with their pencils trying to do their work. –Ms. Swann, former parent and organizer for the new building.

History of AHSDC's Name

The original name of AHSDC was “Alternative School for Disruptive Youth,” and outsiders nicknamed it the “Bad Ass High School.” Mr. Joe changed the school’s name after an influential Black-Latino American athlete lost his life in a plane crash while delivering resources to a village. AHSDC was a rescue mission for failing students. AHSDC began with five students, and it grew to 15 students in just months and continued to increase steadily in population. On Saturdays, Mr. Joe and the AHSDC staff used to host parent planning breakfasts at the school to build community relationships.

History of AHSDC's Location

Mr. Joe and Ms. Swan, former staff members relayed stories to me about AHSDC’s conception and transformation. For 20 years, AHSDC was housed in one-room trailer portables. These portables were worn. Rain and snow, as well as cold air, seeped into the classrooms. Students would huddle with coats, sitting in odd positions to avoid moisture dripping from the ceiling. Mr. Joe, with parents such as Ms. Swan, petitioned the school board for 11 years for a new building. Mr. Joe held press conferences, and Ms. Swan filed a discrimination complaint in Washington D.C. against the school board for inequitable resources. Parents also created and presented a video to the school board, entitled “First Chance High,” which was shown on local TV stations. These efforts proved successful because the school board approved a multi-million project for AHSDC to build a new building.

The founder/principal, Mr. Joe, designed this school on the outskirts of town away from other traditional schools, housing complexes, low-income housing, and local bus lines. Mr. Joe’s strategic beliefs included that physical distance would decrease student truancy, skipping, and distractions. They were taken to their traditional school and transported to AHSDC by school

busses. Mr. Joe remained principal for 30 plus years, and he developed a national day of black parent and school collaboration (Khalifa, 2008).

Changing of Principals

Staff members mentioned that Mr. Joe was fierce as an educator in his younger years. However, after more than 30 years of dedicated service, he became more of a grandfather i.e., easy-going and less of a father figure when it came to disciplining students. A school once known for strict discipline started to become chaotic, with student fights, failing grades, and misbehavior. Staff members were divided, and some went to the administration building to force Mr. Joe's retirement, while other staff members were displeased with this subterfuge. Ms. Lana and Ms. Brenda explained Mr. Joe's transition out of AHSDC:

Mr. Joe, he was no-nonsense, he really wanted the students to do their best, strive to be the best that he could be. He was a no-nonsense kind of person. It was interesting because when I first started teaching here he was in his prime, and up and running and really full of energy. I could see the closer he got to his retirement, he acted like he wanted to be everybody's grandparent, you know what I mean? It was because he had slowed down. But when I first came to the building man, he was fierce he really, really was, and I respected him. –Ms. Lana, English teacher

What I can say is I came at the ending of Joe's career. Even though I know how powerful he is, what I can say is that he had slid into granddaddy mold, which is a little different from daddy mold. –Ms. Brenda, counselor liaison

AHSDC at a Glance: Information and Practices

1. *Mission statement:* All students will develop the attitude, skill set, and work ethic to immediately become productive, valued citizens.

2. *Creed:* Who I am and what I do here will help create the path of what I will become.

Success is not delivered to the lucky but instead to the prepared. I am compromising my future any day that I choose to be unprepared. My future means too much to me for that.

3. ***Enrollment:*** Students were referred by their traditional school, were expelled, or were persuaded to attend AHSDC in lieu of expulsion. After an application was filed, students who were accepted were required to attend an interview process with their parents/guardians. Most students were accepted, but on a case by case basis some were rejected.
4. ***Entrance contracts:*** Upon admittance, students and parents/guardians were expected to sign contracts stating their commitment of responsibility at AHSDC.
5. ***Rap sessions:*** Mandatory bi- weekly meetings for students and staff. These were open and honest discussions about culture, student achievement, and school concerns. Guest speakers came to discuss their life stories, their struggles, and their triumphs.
6. ***Staff member's contact information:*** All students and parents/guardians were given the cellular phone numbers and email addresses of all staff members to contact with their concerns.
7. ***The ten rule:*** All absences must be properly documented. With 10 or more unexcused absences, or 15 or more tardies, student enrollment was to be discontinued.
8. ***Dress code:*** Uniforms were required for all AHSDC students. The uniforms consisted of black dress shoes, black or white socks, black or white collared shirts, a black belt, and black dress pants or non-short skirt (no denim). Honor roll students could dress out of uniform on Fridays. Non-honor roll students could pay \$2 to dress out of uniform. The money collected went toward the end of the year award prizes.
9. ***The E – lounge:*** This was the name for afterschool detention. Students who were failing one or more classes were required to stay with teachers and were expected to complete late work and homework.

10. Awards Ceremony: There were award ceremonies where students on the honor roll with 2.7 or higher GPAs were awarded medals and prizes.

11. Dual Enrollment: Some students were enrolled at two schools. AHSDC (morning classes) and their traditional school (afternoon classes).

There is additional AHSDC information in Appendix, F.

Entering AHSDC's Building

The school is a red, quaint brick building. As I walked into the building and stood in the lobby, I saw the entire school in a tri-view. To the right is a hallway and media center (library), the gym/cafeteria is straight ahead, and to the left are the front desk/office and the last hallway. The lobby is pentagon-shaped, with 9 square windows at the top. The first sign upon entering the building reads: "Welcome to the AHSDC Family." On this same wall are murals of the man for whom the school was named. To the right on the lobby wall is listed the school mission: "All students will develop the attitude, skill sets, and work ethic to immediately become productive valued citizens."

In the lobby a glass cabinet showcases students' artwork as well as boxes of DVD players, laptops, electronics, gift cards that were given at the end-of-year award ceremonies. There are small red lockers on each side of the hall and classrooms. Small plants grow in the hallway near the biology room, and the work of students is displayed on the bulletin boards outside of classrooms. Outside of the history class is a Harlem Renaissance bulletin board of student reports on Langston Hughes, Earl Hines, Lena Horne, Harlem New York, Bessie Smith, and Josephine Baker. Nearby there is an information bulletin board with resources regarding tobacco health, health insurance, free clinics, scholarships, careers, recreation events, dental clinics and ACT dates.

The **front desk** has two doors and two large windows. This is where the community liaison, administrative assistant, and principal had their office space (Ms. Brenda, Ms. Gabriella and Dr. E, respectively). On the walls around the office windows are staff member's resumes and students' college acceptance letters, hung in frames. One student gave Dr. E an 8x10 school portrait; this too is hung on the wall. To the right of the office is a commemorative collage of the Ground Breaking Ceremony of the opening of AHSDC's present building.

The **gym** serves as auditorium, gym, and cafeteria. There are posters all around the walls with positive messages regarding success and healthy lifestyles. One such sign reads: "Success is being yourself, the best you can."

Academic Achievement Gap

Over the past 40 years, Arcadia School District had been criticized for its steep and persistent racial academic achievement gap. Concerned parents of color persistently rallied and met with school board members to discuss strategies to diminish this gap. An example of this gap and information was solicited from Dr. E (see Appendix G). Mention of this achievement gap is important because the school felt its existence helped to diminish the district's Black-White achievement gap.

Participant Narratives

These staff members were extraordinary, because their working days with students extended beyond school hours. Below I extensively discuss the characteristics of these staff members.

AHSDC's Staff Backgrounds

Dr. E is an African American male who has served as AHSDC's principal since 2009. Before working at AHSDC, he was the principal at Sheldon Middle School. He received an EdD

in educational leadership, and his dissertation was a quantitative study on the black-white achievement gap. At AHSDC, he connects with parents and students and has gained a reputation as a principal who ensures the academic achievement of the most difficult students, as he decreases the achievement gap, cleans up, and turns the school around. He has done this with a balance of tough love. He has two Arcadia District Elementary aged sons who visit AHSDC daily before their school day begins.

Dr. E also works as an educational consultant and advisor who examines issues of equity and racial achievement gaps. Dr. E juggles many duties as principal. He facilitates rap sessions; handles new enrollments, parent meetings, and discipline problems; counsels students and parents in his office; and supervises the hallways and classrooms along with his administrative duties. He is also responsible to report and advocate to district administrators about AHSDC's program. Dr. E has the reputation of being "transparent," because he shares his past/present triumphs and failures with his students. The majority of AHSDC students candidly admit that they look to Dr. E as their father.

Ms. Brenda is an African American female who attended school in this district. Ms. Brenda worked as a bus driver in the district for five years, and after transporting AHSDC students, she had a strong desire to work with them inside the school. Former principal Mr. Joe informed her that she needed a bachelor's degree before applying. She went back to school, and after earning a Bachelor's of Science degree she was hired as AHSDC's community liaison. She continues to serve in this capacity, and has done so for the last 10 years.

Ms. Brenda ensures that students receive equitable exposure to educational, social, cultural, and psychological resources in the community, by collaborating with social services. She also jointly handles daily discipline, parent meetings and new enrollment with Dr. E. Since

Ms. Brenda is from the community, she knows all parents, grandparents, and siblings on a personal level. When students have problems or altercations outside of school hours, she is always informed. Her husband attended AHSDC, and his mother also drove an AHSDC's school bus. I noticed AHSDC students would come up to the front desk, stand, smile, and wait for her to greet them. Following her salutation, students would then go back to class. Her nickname is "Mama Bear."

Ms. Karla is a Caucasian female who has worked at AHSDC for the past 30 years as the counselor liaison and student services coordinator. She assists students with grades, transcripts, and schedules. She too is a graduate from Arcadia School District, and one of her sons attended AHSDC. She stays in contact with former students and their parents/families after graduation. Ms. Karla has her own room/office where students can go for a quiet space to study. She has a wealth of knowledge concerning the school and the district's history. She has folders of historical documents which she kindly shared, as out AHSDC's transition from one-room trailers into a million-dollar school building. She holds a BS in occupational therapy.

Ms. Lana is a teacher who stated at a rap session that she loved being an African American female. She taught African American literature and American Literature. She holds a B.A. in English and an M.A. in English literature. Her classroom is decorated with portraits of influential African Americans, and she has a podium in the left corner where students stand to deliver speeches and presentations. She had worked in the district for 32 years and she has been at AHSDC for 28 years. When students were asked to identify their favorite teacher, Ms. Lana's name was often mentioned. She teaches with passion and humor, and students said that she related to them. Race, racism, and societal perceptions are consistent topics that she discusses

with students. She often helps students identify college scholarship information, and she edits their college applications essays.

Mr. Shaw is a Caucasian male who has taught biology, ecology, life science, physical science, earth science, and algebra at AHSDC for the past 26 years. He holds a B.S. in Biology, with a minor in Earth Science. Two of his sons attended AHSDC. He mentioned that he could relate to the behavior of students due to his similar behavior as a youth. Mr. Shaw began working as a farmer manager for a school district, and thus he brought hands-on learning to his science courses. He has a reputation of joking around and being sarcastic, which is one of the ways he connects with students. Personally, I have not seen a Caucasian male who candidly talks about race, racism, privilege, and power quite like Mr. Shaw. During a rap session discussion he commented that white people will not say things to your face, but they talk behind your back cruelly, based on stereotypes. Mr. Shaw has a vast knowledge of history and racism in this school district.

Mr. Klein is an African American male who serves as the health and physical education teacher at AHSDC. He has been an educator for 23 years, and he worked at AHSDC for seven years. He holds a B.A. in physical education/health and an M.A. in education administration. Depending on a student's schedule, Mr. Klein could teach the same student twice in a day (both health and physical education class), which enables him to get to know students well. Mr. Klein went to school in the Arcadia School District, and he stated that he did not do well academically and had disciplinary problems. He characterized himself as a fighter who had been undiagnosed with Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder. He attended AHSDC for one year of summer school, where he met Mr. Joe. His children attended school in the Arcadia School District. Outside of AHSDC, he serves as a tutor, counselor, treatment specialist, and coach.

Mr. Ray describes himself as a half-Mexican and half Black male adopted by White parents in a predominately white town. He holds a B.A. in English and a teaching certificate in E.L.A. secondary education. He is an English teacher who teaches “Read 180,” a reading recovery class that offered students strategies, procedures, and methods to improve their writing, reading, and spelling skills. Mr. Ray has worked in the educational field for 14 years, and at AHSDC for three years. Mr. Ray is known by students for being strict, but fair. He strives to teach in ways that support diverse learners. He struggled in school himself and was not diagnosed properly for Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder and Auditory Processing Dyslexia. Mr. Ray recently published a book for youth to recognize and learn their ABC’s.

Ms. Adrienne is a Caucasian female teacher who teaches physical science, ecology, earth science chemistry, and physics. She has taught science for the past 16 years, with 11 of those years being at AHSDC. Her career began as an environmental scientist for government and private agencies. As a former quality control chemist, she is able to offer hands-on and practical knowledge and learning for students. Before coming to AHSDC, she worked at a private school. She mentioned that she has a reputation of being an “academic” teacher, and she is excited as AHSDC’s students move toward higher education. Ms. Adrienne sits on science curriculum committees and writes grants to seek resources for AHSDC students comparable to traditional school students. She holds a B.S. in geography/environmental science, an M.A. in geography, and a teaching certificate in secondary earth science. She was selected by a student athlete at AHSDC for the outstanding teacher award.

Mr. Carlos is an African American male who serves as AHSDC’s social worker. He is a Licensed Social Work (LMSW), focused in the area of children and families and juveniles. He has worked in the field of advocacy, education, and counseling for the past 11 years. He worked

at AHSDC for just over one year. Mr. Carlos started his own family counseling business and works with black males extensively through his church as an advocate, counselor, and mentor. Mr. Carlos worked part time at AHSDC (two days) and part time at another Arcadia elementary school (three days). It was common for students to come to the office in a stressed state and ask if Mr. Carlos would be in the building that day. It was not uncommon for the staff to call Mr. Carlos for assistance on days he was at his elementary school. Staff members often mentioned how AHSDC needed a full time social worker. Mr. Carlos sat in on Individualized Educational Plan (IEP) meetings with teacher consultants and met with staff, students, and parents and/or guardians. Mr. Carlos mentioned that he did not plan to go to college, because he thought it was only for rich people; however, a teacher pushed him toward college and believed in him.

Ms. Tracee is an African American female who teaches math at AHSDC. She holds an M.A. and B.S. in mathematics and has been an educator in the areas of math and computer applications for the past 15 years. She started teaching in an inner city, and she has worked at AHSDC for three years. During the first month of this study, I observed from the hallway Ms. Tracee talking to a student. Ms. Tracee was leaning in front of the student's desk and talking to her quietly as she helped her with math problems. I later learned that this student was frustrated and on the verge of tears, because she did not understand her math lesson. This event was evidence of Ms. Tracee's personal interaction with frustrated students. She started her career as a computer programmer, but switched to education because she missed the more personable side of working with people. Ms. Tracee grew up in an inner city and recognized that identity development is an issue of many black students in the Arcadia School District. Students described Ms. Tracee as being motherly.

Mr. Turner is an African American male who serves as a math teacher at AHSDC. He has been an educator for three years and worked at AHSDC for two years. Mr. Turner and his wife have children of their own, but also have helped to raise younger relatives. Students describe Mr. Turner as a father figure. During a rap session, Mr. Turner shared that he had struggled in school and graduated with a low GPA. It was not until college that his educational potential was realized. Due to his rocky schooling, he has great patience and compassion for students who are struggling, and he realizes that there are multiple ways to teach youth. Many students praised Mr. Turner for taking complicated concepts and making them simple to understand. Before working at AHSDC, he worked at a large inner-city school. Mr. Turner left AHSDC for a short period of time to work as a professional development specialist, but soon returned after missing student interaction. He holds a B.S. and an M.S. in mathematics.

Mr. Clark is a Caucasian male who serves as AHSDC's history and geography teacher. He is affectionately known as the "radical teacher" in the school. His master's degree is in social foundations, with a multicultural and eco-justice focus. He works with various non-profit groups that support social justice. He has been an educator for 22 years, and he has worked at AHSDC for three years. Before teaching at AHSDC, he taught at a different alternative school, which he described as being wrongfully dismantled. Mr. Clark likes to take his students on field trips for hands on experience in the area of social justice and activism. One popular trip was to an inner city high school that was fighting closure and in need of support. His world history class that I observed had students discussing slavery, reparations, and the reconstruction era.

I did not interview all AHSDC staff, yet had the privilege of getting to know them well through participant observations (see Appendix H).

AHSDC's Student Backgrounds

Yeltsin [now deceased] was an 18-year-old who dropped out of school. Yet at the urging of his cousin, an AHSDC alumnus, he enrolled to complete his senior year at AHSDC. Being from the Yellowstone School District, his attendance brought in revenue to the Arcadia School District. Dr. E stated at a rap session that Yeltsin was a student with one of the best attitudes. Yeltsin self-identified as Hispanic, of Mexican descent. He was born on the East coast, then moved to the Southwest, where he attended schools with strong ESL programs. He learned English when he was nine years old. In middle school, he moved up north with his mother and brothers, while his father remained in Mexico. Yeltsin's grades in middle school were A's and B's, yet due to negative peer influences, his grades plummeted. He explained that his older cousins encouraged him to engage in negative activities, and he began to skip school, drink alcohol, smoke weed, and tag walls.

His high school referral paperwork indicated excessive unexcused absences and insubordinate behavior, which included walking out of a class before being formally dismissed. He said his teachers in the traditional schools lowered their academic expectations for him:

I used to miss so many days of school. I used to walk into class with my phone, and I would get a dictionary and just sleep. Use it as a pillow. So they [teachers] didn't really care. I think they did take attendance. They didn't never tell me about the test. They knew I wasn't going to pass. And like, I would just be on my phone in front of them. I guess they got tired of it, and they just didn't say anything [to me].

He recalled mistreatment in high school based on race, and his behavior reflected defiance:

There was this teacher in economics, I was new and I was the only Hispanic in that class. And she was talking about transporting things like cars, Chinese food, and all that. And she was like, we export Mexicans or something like that. And she tried to act like it wasn't mean. They [students] knew she crossed the line. I didn't say nothing. I was new, I couldn't say nothing. I just sat there. I did care, but I think I lost respect for her.

Nina is a 17-year-old junior who self-identified as Hispanic and who was born in the Dominican Republic. She moved to the US for junior high school, unable to speak English. She resides with her mother, stepfather, and younger brother in low-income housing. Her sister is still awaiting her immigration papers. Her mother works at a restaurant, and her step-father is an employee of the Arcadia District. She had no IEP; however, she initially attended schools where ESL services were nonexistent, thus leaving her to learn English from her Hispanic classmates.

In Talbert Middle School, Nina said she was ignored by teachers because she could not speak English. She recalled how lost she felt:

I went there for like three days, like I was crying, like I couldn't understand if we had homework or nothing. I was just lost and then I told my mom and she talked to Dr. E. I think, and then they made the transfer or whatever. And he said yeah I could go to Sheldon [Middle School]. They [parents] just had to pick me up because there was no bus. They [Sheldon] helped me out, my English and stuff, my homework. I used to have a class [at Talbert] called ESL, like English second language. The lady that was teaching it, she only speak English, she wasn't speaking no Spanish or nothing.

She also experienced teacher and peer discrimination based on language and race:

The lady that teach biology she was white. She is basically racist, because she said that black people and Spanish people they're the same. This white girl asked for help or whatever the teacher went right away. And then me and my friend [asked and she wouldn't help]. We spoke Spanish. Sometimes, I mean when you say something and then it don't sound right, people will get mad at you. Like, I just wanted to fit in at first, but then I mean, after I found out that wasn't the solution, now I'm happy.

Nina's mother, at the recommendation of a neighbor, enrolled her in Sheldon Middle School, where Dr. E was principal. In her 9th grade year [at Prescott High], Nina began skipping and leaving school. Her mom upon finding out, was determined to enroll her at AHSDC, where Dr. E was now principal. During the study she was given the *Student Of The Year* award. Nina was deemed ready to leave AHSDC, yet she asked staff to allow her to stay.

Tonya is the only student who did not meet the attendance criteria determined by Dr. E for student participation as listed in Chapter 3. However, after she talked to Dr. E, he allowed me to decide if she could participate in this study. I said yes because I appreciated her enthusiasm and initiative. Although she exhibited great enthusiasm in the beginning, she had some difficulties throughout the school year. A common conversation staff had with Tonya was about responsibility, attendance, and not slacking off. During the study, attendance became a problem, due to her being tired or absent. She was enrolled in AP classes at Prescott High School.

Tonya is a 17-year-old 11th grader who identifies herself as an African American female. Before attending AHSDC, she was on the honor role in middle school and had A.P. classes in high school. However, in high school she stopped caring about school. Later she admitted that when school became hard, she would not ask for help, fell behind, and then stopped attending classes. She mentioned that it was too easy to skip at her traditional high school, and she would call school sick, pretending to be her mother:

I just didn't care. I just wasn't going to school like that. I just did not care. Seriously I did NOT care. I'm just giving an example, like first through sixth [hour], if I don't feel like sitting in that class, I'm not going. Some mornings I didn't wake up, like let me sleep. If you go and you skip basically it's on your parents. If your parents aren't like you gotta go to school, it will mean nothing. Because all they [school] gonna do is call [home]. And you can always call [school] yourself. You can always call and excuse yourself.

Tonya was a self-referral to AHSDC, and she was adamant in verbalizing that she decided to attend. She entered AHSDC with an IEP for deficits in reading and writing. Yet, after half a year of school, she was evaluated again by teacher consultants Ms. Penelope and Ms. Katie and taken off her IEP. She lives with her mother and is the only child in her household. Her mother works at the hospital, and her father is a chef.

Martin his life and background is a national publicized story. The newspaper followed him for two years, highlighting his challenges and triumphs. Born in the inner city, Martin had a lot of challenging experiences. He is an 18-year-old senior student who identified himself as a Black American male. At the age of nine years old he witnessed his father being murdered by his uncle, and afterwards he was bounced among family members. His mom was in and out of prison and was released near the end of this study.

I was nine, so didn't nobody tell me nothing about that. And then two weeks later after my dad got shot, my mom went to jail for five years. So I didn't you know, I wasn't the type of kid to just, you know still focus in school and stuff with so much stuff [going on]. It was like, I was going through day to day thinking, but not thinking because I was too young to understand what was happening.

Because of these disturbing family experiences, he did not remember much of his earlier schooling. Martin described himself as a child sitting in the back of the classroom in a daze. He recounted being treated differently in elementary school; concluding that he was placed in special education since his teachers did not want to be bothered with him nor his problems.

Yeah like I said it was a special class for kids, who had bad lives, environments, for [kids] that just wasn't paying attention. Sitting in the classroom with kids who was doing they work, you the only one not doing your work, so you know. Yeah we just didn't do the work. But that's just what they [teachers] do because you know, they just don't want to deal with the problems. Sometimes teachers don't want to deal with it.

Martin remembers hearing about life on his own as family members tried to shelter him from its harsh realities. He gave the example of not knowing what death was until a later age. Before attending AHSDC, he was involved in illegal activities such as breaking into people's houses to steal and using substances. He was referred to AHSDC for failing grades and bullying. He entered AHSDC as a 9th grader, and his mom was happy for him to turn his life around. Martin was dual enrolled at AHSDC and Hamilton High School.

Raynard is an 11th grade 17-year-old male student. He identifies himself as an African-American. He lives with his mother, who was employed at the post office, and a younger sister. He has an older brother who is incarcerated, a sister with cancer, and his father lives in a different city. After spending his earlier schooling in an inner city school, his mother moved their family. She hoped he would attain a better education and stay out of legal trouble. He was on the B honor roll in middle school, yet without consistent discipline, had trouble maintaining.

His referral file listed academic deficiencies, poor competency skills, and failing school courses. In his discipline report, he had three insubordination/open defiance accounts; one academic dishonesty allegation; and one disruptive conduct. Raynard discussed how he and other youth his age dislike teachers. He stated that he felt teachers were against him. He remembered white female teachers who held low expectations and were afraid of him. One teacher would tremble when he approached her:

I think my 6th grade teacher was scared of me. I had an English class, the teacher basically told me: I think you can at least pass this class [with a D]. I didn't get to say nothing 'cause my mom got mad and she handled it. Basically she [teacher] thought I was dumb and I ended up passing the class with a B anyway.

During the school day, he would often come to the office wanting to leave class and finish his work without distractions in a private room. Substance usage was common, and he stated it was necessary in order to help him concentrate and be more productive in school. He did not feel that this hurt him or his academic aspirations. In this city, stories of middle school students losing their minds after smoking weed unknowingly laced with crack was common. His goal after graduating high school is to attend Louisville University to be an entrepreneur. Female teachers complained of his disrespect, and staff stated that he had potential to be a strong leader; however, because of his negative peer associations, he is a follower.

Jocelyn is a 17-year-old graduating senior who identifies herself as an African-American female. She attends AHSDC in the morning and Hamilton High in the afternoon, earning grades and credits at both schools. Following her parent's divorce, she moved with her mother, and her father remained in a city 30 minutes away. Her parent's divorce brought about adjustment problems, and her grades began to slip from A's and B's to C's, D's, and E's.

Her academic referral file listed skipping, lack of homework completion, and loss of focus as concerns. Her strengths listed were capability, personal ability, excellent communication skills, and a strong leader. During her ninth grade year at Hamilton High, she earned no credits, after receiving 6 E's in all her classes. She recalled how older peers influenced her to skip school daily, thus affecting her studies:

I was hanging out with seniors. They had senioritis, they skipped often. Just into everything, like right? So that was bad. That was BAD. It was like, okay say probably my routine was like, I missed first, second, maybe third [hour]. And I'd go the rest of the day [to school].

She attended summer school at AHSDC then transferred into AHSDC as a sophomore. Because of family hardships, she became homeless before the study began, and homeless again towards the end of the study; her grades at AHSDC fluctuated.

We moved to a shelter. It was okay 'cause there's nothing I can do about it. So I'm not gonna make it a big deal, 'cause at least I have somewhere to stay. So I was very humble about it. He [bus driver] dropped me off at the corner. I waited until the bus leaves, 'cause it was on a busy street too, so I didn't want anyone to see me. I'd run into the shelter's door. I was like, oh my God, I don't want anybody to see me. So we lived there for like a month, and then my mom she got her unemployment, so that was good.

With so many personal challenges during the final trimester of school, her grades began to suffer. However, she always maintains a positive attitude and a smile. She is interested in entering the health profession and was accepted into a University in Atlanta.

Jackson (Jack) is a 10th grade 16-year-old student who identifies himself as a Caucasian skater boy from the East Coast. Prior to attending AHSDC, he recounted instances of teachers thinking he was Emo or Goth, who mistreated him after he dyed his naturally dishpan blonde hair to the color black.

Oh definitely teachers. Well 'cause like the first couple days of school I had blonde hair. But then I just came one day with black hair, and they were like whoa what's up with all this change? And like I don't know, I almost feel like they were not as comfortable with me as they were [before] because of that change. They were like pushing me away.

Jack stated that he witnessed racism at his traditional schools:

I've seen so much racism towards black kids in my school. Yeah. I think when a teacher sees like a white person they're thinking like, this person is gonna pay attention [to me]. I'll teach THEM. Like my teacher he was always looking at [teaching] me, not [looking] at the black kids.

His mother, following a divorce from his step-father, his autistic younger brother, and he moved to the Midwest to be closer to family. Jack's move away from his girlfriend and friends caused him to slip into a state of depression, and he started using substances to escape his pain.

He entered AHSDC during the summer following his eighth grade year. His referral file indicated that while in junior high he was a smart student, but had low grades, an apathetic attitude, "Mellow" affect, and inconsistent effort. In eighth grade, he had notices of suspensions for possession of illegal substances and for smoking marijuana in the boy's restroom. There was also a letter in his file from his middle school principal stating that he had excessive accumulated absences and/or tardiness. Other discipline concerns included being disruptive during class. He had no IEP. After his first year summer school at AHSDC, he received the rising Star Award for promising students. Throughout this study, he struggled with substance abuse, depression and failing grades.

Helena is a 10th grade student from Yellowstone School District whose attendance brought in revenue to the Arcadia School District. She identifies herself as African American mixed female, with Puerto Rican, Arabic, and Caucasian background. She lived with her mother, who worked with youth. Helena is known for severe outbursts toward adults and classmates. The first time I interviewed her, she had just cursed out the art teacher. She shared that she has been diagnosed with bipolar disorder and ADHD, but her mother does not want her labeled.

Helena remembered her traditional schools, and even though her grades were average while there, often times she would get into trouble for being disrespectful:

I used to have bad citizenship. I was sassy, it's a bad thing when you run your mouth too much to teachers. I was just real. I was. Me and my friends we thought we took over the school [Yellowstone High]. The teachers said we was bullies. I really wasn't no bully. I don't go around taking people's lunch money and stuff. I just tell people the way I feel, how I feel. I don't know, I used to spaz out on teachers. I still do sometimes, I try to get better, but I spaz out on people. I got a real bad temper. I mean, I have a smart mouth, still got a smart mouth. I cuss people out. I cuss teachers out, all of them.

Helena stated she did not like teachers because they were irritating. She felt as if her traditional high school plotted to have her removed.

Yellowstone High School kicked me out. They kicked me out and I came here. I got filed for trespassing and then truancy. I was skipping inside the school, sometimes I would leave, but most the time I was inside the school. I think they was plotting me out of there. But I don't care that they was trying to get me out. I'm glad they was trying to get me up out of there. I was trying to get up out of there.

During this study, she was suspended off the bus, and the report reads as follows:

“...Because of aggressive actions toward driver and said she would ‘fuck’ her up, proceeded to walk up over to her saying she ‘don't care if she old....’ Student was very aggressive and threatening....” Throughout the study, there were numerous interactions with staff for her disruptive behavior and outbursts.

Summary

This school and its participants have a rich background and stories. Chapter 5 introduces and discusses relevant themes found from the data collected in the form of individual interviews, focus groups, documentation, and participant observations.

CHAPTER 5:

INTRODUCTION TO DATA ANALYSIS

My time at AHSDC yielded a plethora of data in the form of interviews, focus groups, participant observations, and documentation. Dr. E informed me that effective schooling correlates (Edmonds, 1979; Lezotte, 1991), were used to form the foundation of his school. I understood and postulated that data I gathered would reflect effective school theory. This indeed was the case; however, students' and staff members' lived experiences extended beyond the correlates of effective schooling.

In this chapter, I identified five different themes that show AHSDC supported previously failing students into ones who persisted, graduated, and attended college. This was indeed challenging, because I found that even though these themes were different, they were very much intertwined. At their core, all the themes were focused on student success, yet to choose only one or two themes would severely limit the stories and lived experiences in this alternative school. These themes, expressed in participant's lived experiences, encompassed various facets at AHSDC: leadership, school structure, environment, student and staff interaction, teacher practices, and student development. These five themes are:

1. Strong, Culturally Relevant and Authentic African American Leadership (Brown & Beckett, 2007; Khalifa, 2008; Lomotey, 1989; Paige & Witty, 2010)
2. Effective Schooling (Edmonds, 1979; Lezotte, 1991)
3. Culturally Relevant Interactions (Ladson-Billings, 2009)
4. Warm Demanders (Bondy & Ross, 2008; Kleinfeld, 1972; Ross et al., 2008)
5. Focus on Non-Academic Needs (Foster, 1997; Noguera, 2003)

From this data, verbatim quotes, activities, documentation, and participation observations from students and staff shed light and brought meaning to the lived experiences at AHSDC. The language in the form of verbatim text was conversational and less formal, especially for students. Students were honest and comfortable with me and relaxed with their language. I noticed that they were able to code switch when necessary, and the way they wrote would be classified more as traditional English.

THEME 1:

STRONG, CULTURALLY RELEVANT AND AUTHENTIC AFRICAN AMERICAN LEADERSHIP

“What does AHSDC have to offer me as a student? Well, first of all you can't separate AHSDC from Dr. E” –Martin, 12th grader

The opening quote, from Martin, was a sentiment shared by students and staff alike at AHSDC. It was routine for Dr. E to enter classrooms and to be visible in hallways between classes. His office door stayed open, with the exception of meetings and conference calls. Students would often come to the front desk distressed and ask Ms. Gabriella, the administrative assistant, if they could talk to the principal.

Regime Change

Before working at AHSDC, Dr. E worked at Sheldon Middle School, also in Arcadia School District, and he had earned the reputation of being an academic powerhouse. Dr. E stated,

The previous superintendent asked me to go to Sheldon Middle School and I was like, why? He was like your reputation [in the state] is one that can clean up schools. He said you're the only principal in this district that can do that for me. –Dr. E, principal

After Mr. Joe decided to retire, he took it upon himself to find a replacement. Mr. Joe strategically chose Dr. E to carry on AHSDC's legacy and mission of assisting students failing in traditional schools. Dr. E assumed the role of principal in 2009. Dr. E recalled the discussion between him and Mr. Joe:

Mr. Joe retired from the school and called me up. He told me he'd liked me to consider taking the school [AHSDC]. He was like, I was the only one that can do it here. And that was a great honor. –Dr. E, principal

Some staff members described that even though they were sorry to see Mr. Joe go, it was time for the founding principal to enjoy retirement. The staff embraced Dr. E as their new leader, in hopes of AHSDC restoring order, achievement, and discipline.

Mr. Joe did a fabulous job in getting the school started. And all the stuff that he did for students who came here which I know, I grew up with him. It's just like a boxer when you get to the point where it's time to retire and let somebody else take the reign, you know? That's basically what happened and it was a good thing for Mr. Joe. I'm sure because it's less stress on him and he can enjoy the rest of his life in retirement. But, also it's a new heart beat in the school, that can bring new ideas changes and challenges for both staff and students. And that's actually what's going on. –Mr. Klein, PE/health teacher

I say Dr. E is probably how Mr. Joe was in his heyday. So I like to be a part of that because this is how the school was made. So I was glad we were able to get back to that. –Ms. Brenda, community liaison

Aspects of Leadership

Dr. E was mentioned repeatedly during students' and staff member's individual interviews. Thus, I framed my discussion of Dr. E around four leadership tenets: 1) Black Principals (Brown & Beckett, 2007; and Lomotey, 1989); 2) Strong Leadership (Presley et al., 2004); 3) Culturally Relevant Leadership (Khalifa, 2008) and 4) Authentic African American Leaders (Paige & Witty, 2010).

Black Principals

Brown & Beckett (2007) and Lomotey (1989) reported that in the 1970s and 1980s, following desegregation and the civil rights movement, there was a loss of black educators and community cohesiveness. Black principals more recently were again brought in to assist black youth who are not achieving academically. The Black principals in their studies showed leadership in the following areas: caring and compassion, empowerment for students, high standards for students and staff, and understanding of black youth and their communities. During

collective interviews, Dr. E articulated all of the above items as part of his daily principal duties. Students and staff recognized these qualities in their principal as well.

Caring and Compassion

Jack, the only Caucasian student in this study, stated that he appreciated the chances and compassion given to him by Dr. E. Jack dealt with issues of depression and substance abuse, which affected his schooling.

Well the best things for me was actually giving me so many chances, like left and right giving me second chances. He [Dr. E] knows I am trying to do better, but at the same time he's like man you're screwing up. So he's like coaching me kind of. And I've gotten in a lot of trouble here that I should've been kicked out for it. Like in a heartbeat. I should've been just, it shouldn't of been questionable. All he did was give me a 10 day suspension. I think like 'cause he knew like something was going on like outside of school with me. I think he just saw me struggling and like kind of wanted me to come his way, like Martin did. I'm just really thankful he's given me so many chances. –Jack, 10th grader

Empowerment for Students

During the month of February, AHSDC school staff and students traveled to the local movie theater to watch Steven Spielberg's 2012 film "Red Tails." Following the film, students watched the HBO 1995 film "Tuskegee Airmen" during a rap session. Dr. E then assigned students to write a critical essay comparing the two films. Dr. E talked about his goals and expectations that this project would build empowerment, student efficacy, leadership, and pride in their culture.

There was a student of his own merits who said hey, I would like to moderate [the rap session discussion]. He wanted to help me and I told him no. You do it yourself. That's how I empower students, because I trust them. Do-it-yourself. So I had the student write up questions. I told him I needed to see the questions in advance. I get the right kids involved and then I take them out of their comfort zone. –Dr. E, principal

High Standards for Students

During another rap session, students listened to a guest speaker, Mr. Randolph, a former civil rights freedom rider. Raynard recounted in his interview how he felt after Dr. E and Ms. Lana assisted him in facilitating this rap session. Raynard was a student who teachers described as “riding the fence.” He was said to have great leadership and academic potential, but continually allowed himself to be deterred by peers and by making poor choices. This leadership opportunity for him was one that boosted his self-efficacy and allowed him to step away from his peers to be a leader.

I introduced Mr. Ray Randolph a former Freedom Rider. I had to do paper in Ms. Lana’s class on Freedom Riders. So I asked Dr. E, if you knew anything about it ‘cause I didn’t know what I was doing, and then Dr. E told me that he actually knew one [freedom rider]. So he gave me his [Mr. Randolph’s] number and I called him and I asked him if you’d like to come to one of our rap sessions. He said he would be delighted. He’s not really a celebrity, but he’s somebody who did something for us to be where we are right now. –Raynard, 11th grader

Understanding for Black Youth and Their Communities

Dr. E stated that racism and stereotypes were prevalent in schools. It was essential for staff members to address their bias and seek to understand their students. Below, Dr. E speaks of the importance of extending educator knowledge beyond textbooks to community knowledge:

There’s more knowledge than book knowledge. There’s knowledge of the community. I think that’s important. A teacher needs to extend himself or herself to your community. When I consult I go in [school] and I say this: how long have you been a teacher at the school? I’m new to the area, where can a brother get a haircut around here and they’ve got no answer? You’re not connected to our community, because you ought to know. We’re paying tax money, you ought to know where to get a haircut for a black student.
–Dr. E, principal

Strong Leadership

Presley et al. (2004) found the following traits necessary successfully to educate Black students: academic focus, orderliness, strong leadership, and accountability. Dr. E was known in the district for being a no-nonsense leader.

Academic Focus

Before students could attend AHSDC, they had to be approved by staff and endure a serious interview process accompanied by their parent/guardian. Students could be denied admission if they did not exhibit respect and a willingness to make changes. Dr. E made it clear that he was molding a different type of student at AHSDC: an academic student. Dr. E stated,

If you're impeding the education of everybody else, you have to go. I don't tolerate that at all. If you don't want your education, that's fine. I'm fine with that, sad for you, but if you want to disrupt and blow everybody else's education that comes, you've gotta go. I have no shame kicking kids out. Part of my philosophy is everybody is not intended for this school. Maybe there's another school for you. I'm just not up for your nonsense, if you're not here to get your education. Joe would take the worst of the worst and I refuse to do that. I'm not. This is not a school where you get to bullshit and do whatever you want to and wreck the environment. Not at all. I will not allow that, whatsoever. So I'm taking a different kind of student because I can, I mean it's that simple. I'm not giving kids a second chance to do the same stuff that they did before. I mean there are consequences for your behavior and the choices that you make. –Dr. E, principal

Orderliness

Mr. Turner, math instructor, shared that leadership and order begin at the top with the principal and flow down to staff and students. Mr. Turner had previously taught in a large inner city school district that did not have strong leadership. He was appreciative of Dr. E's leadership at AHSDC, because he felt it promoted order.

It's a structured program [AHSDC] and right at the top of that of the list is just having Dr. E as a leader. I know the difference between having a principal like Dr. E, and not having a principal like Dr. E. I've seen at least four different principals and Dr. E. You know it starts at the top. What the principal does is how the school goes. You know, when I was

in [inner city school] the principal didn't have a handle on the building. And so that's what made it a stressful place to work. You know, the kids didn't have it together like you know, like they have it together here. –Mr. Turner, math teacher.

Strong Leadership

Tonya stated that Dr. E was a good principal, had integrity, and, since his arrival had positively influenced students.

Dr. E he's a good principal. I ain't gonna lie. Because when he came here, you know stuff just started happening, people started getting it together, you know? More than in the past, you know? I feel like, if he say something, he's a man about his word. He'll get it done. –Tonya, 11th grader

Accountability

Yeltsin shared that Dr. E was like a father because he cared enough to tell students when they were messing up and would hold them accountable for their actions.

'Cause the other principals like they did talk to me, but they didn't really. I can't say that they didn't care about me, but in my eyes they didn't. Because they didn't, they wouldn't push me or they would have more important things to do than talk to students and not just me, many students. They just let students walk around hallways talking on the phone or playing music. And so that means they don't care what students do. But with Dr. E, like he's different everybody knows that like he sometimes, he'll tell you, like he said, Imma tell you when you're f-ing up he'll just say it. He like, he cares about everybody. He's like a dad. –Yeltsin, 12th grader

One day during observations, Dr. E brought in a student who was not living up to his academic agreement/contract. The student said that he would simply leave AHSDC and go to another school. Dr. E ushered him to his office, told him to sit down and to call and shop around for a different school. After the student called a few schools, he exited the office, went back to class and decided on his own he would stay at AHSDC and follow his signed contract. This was an example of Dr. E's leadership and of how he held students responsible for their actions.

Culturally Relevant Leadership

In an ethnographic study of leadership at AHSDC, Khalifa (2008) found that a close relationship between the school and community, acceptance of the cultural and social capital of students, and a high level of trust and rapport were necessary for school leadership to increase student success.

Close Relationships between School and Community

During a meeting, Yeltsin's mother brought homemade Mexican food as a sign of gratitude, and she told Dr. E that he was a father figure to her sons. While at AHSDC, I saw parents bring in soul food, Latino cuisine, and Indian food for staff members. Families bringing food and birthday presents to AHSDC staff members to show their appreciation was not uncommon.

Acceptance of Cultural and Social Capital

Over the course of this study, I observed parents visiting AHSDC to ask Dr. E and Ms. Brenda for help with their child. One day Yeltsin's mom, Minerva, met with Dr. E. Since Minerva only spoke Spanish, the Spanish teacher sat in the meeting to translate, to ensure effective understanding and communication. Minerva asked Dr. E to talk to her sons about being more helpful and respectful at home. She also asked Dr. E to keep an eye on them when she traveled out of town for a week. No matter the race, gender, language, social economic status, or background of a parent/guardian, AHSDC staff remained respectful and allowed them to contribute their knowledge and social capital when discussing the best interests of their child (Delpit, 1988).

High Level of Trust and Rapport

All student participants stated that they felt loved and saw Dr. E as a father figure, one

who was concerned about their well-being and success. Yelstin stated, “He's like, he's like a dad to me...Dr. E is different, he worries about us like his children.” Martin said, “Dr. E, [he's] my pops up tops.” Nina believed Dr. E was her hero:

Well I mean Dr. E, he like basically, kind of, I don't say my hero because he's not a hero, but I mean he's kinda like it [a hero]. I look up a lot to him because he's like my father or whatever. And I didn't have that. So he do care about us kids and stuff. I mean I'm glad that he does because that's a plus. –Nina, 11th grader

Jocelyn spoke of how she felt Dr. E was a father whom she wanted to be proud of her:

Dr. E, okay the kind of relationship that I have with him is like, I want to say he's like a father. People here [AHSDC] have never had, like that kind of relationship. If I ever go to him and wanna talk I always have to have something in my hand, and that's just like for me. I want to be able to present and be like, look, be proud of me because of this. And he always tell me he's proud of me and I'm like awww. And like it's kind of funny 'cause my dad, he's always tell me he's proud of me, but like he's not here to see what I'm doing. So when Dr. E tells me he's proud of me and hugs me, I'm like yeah. –Jocelyn, 12th grader

Authentic African American Leadership

Paige & Witty (2010) created the term Authentic African American Leadership which is reflected by the following characteristics in schools:

1. Leadership which identifies and confronts major barriers to African American advancement as opposed to merely addressing minor or simple new grabbing issues.
2. Leadership that is unselfish and intended for the betterment of others.
3. Leadership that is virtuous by generally accepted American standards (p. 7-8).

For the past 30 years, Arcadia School District had a steep academic achievement gap.

Students, mainly minorities, who failed for more than six years in traditional schools were sent to

AHSDC. AHSDC then had the job of rectifying past student academic damage, in order to diminish this achievement gap. Dr. E discussed with me the areas AHSDC could improve:

What are some of the areas that we struggled in? The ACT test scores were ridiculous. The senior class, not the junior class. The junior class takes theirs in the next five weeks. The senior class bombed, totally bombed. That hit me hard because the year before that, those kids did well. Am I hopeful? I mean all I can be is hopeful. [But] I don't believe in standardized test because inherently they're bias. -Dr. E, principal

The academic achievement gap was a prominent discussion and concern for Dr. E. His (2004) doctoral dissertation was a quantitative study of the impacts of parental involvement and small class size on the academic achievement gap. Recommendations from his study included awareness of consistent research; focus on quality programs such as early education and small class size; and implementing teacher intervention strategies connected to parents. Dr. E, in a local newspaper article entitled "AHSDC: Focused on closing the achievement gap one student at a time," was quoted as saying, "We're really about sending kids to college."

Jencks and Phillips (1998) reported that by reducing the academic achievement gap, social justice would be promoted by reducing radicalized stratification in health care, crime, and family structures. Martin, during an interview, discussed Dr. E's commitment to helping students change their lives for the better:

This man right here [Dr. E] really change lives. All you gotta do, you stay straight. You gotta stay true to yourself you know. And if then Dr. E see you give an arm and then he'll give you an arm. That's how it went with me. He saw me give my right arm, and he gave his left. And I gave my leg and he gave me his leg, we traded. -Martin, 12th grader

To conclude this theme, I will use words Mr. Ray, English teacher, used to describe Dr. E:

1. Dynamic
2. Inspirational
3. Driven

4. Knowledgeable
5. Holds staff and students accountable
6. Friend

THEME 2:

EFFECTIVE SCHOOLING

Some people call them 90-90-90 correlates or 90-90-90 philosophies; it's really the seven correlates of effective schools. Their research was of inner city schools that were having 90% achievement with 90% poverty and 90% minority student population. They found that they had seven things in common, and I focus on those seven things. That's how you turn a school around. If you know which correlates you're doing well, then you can focus on the ones you're not doing well. –Dr. E, principal

During our second interview, I asked Dr. E, the principal about his philosophy as an educator. He stated that a philosophy that he utilizes and implements as a principal are the 90-90-90 correlates, or the seven correlates of effective schools (Edmonds, 1979; Lezotte, 1991). In the above quote he introduces these correlates. Dr. E was the only individual who specifically labeled these correlates. However, during interviews participants mentioned ways they unknowingly implemented these correlates into their classrooms, or experienced them as students at AHSDC. In this theme, I share the experiences of students and staff with effective school correlates. These seven correlates are as follows:

1. Safe and orderly environment
2. Instructional leadership
3. High expectations for all students (and staff)
4. Students time on task and opportunity to learn
5. On-going assessment/monitoring of progress
6. Home-school relationships and
7. Clear and focused school mission (Edmonds, 1979; pp. 15-23; Lezotte, 1991, pp.1-6).

I introduce each correlate with Dr. E's definition and how he verbally described them, then supplement each definition with students' and staff members' lived experiences. Dr.

E listed correlates in the order that he implements them. He stated that the first correlate was the most important because it affects all others.

Correlate 1: Safe and Orderly Environment

The first correlate that I start with is *safe and orderly environment*. If you don't have a safe and orderly environment, I mean it doesn't matter which you have, all the other ones are irrelevant. If the building is not safe and not orderly, everybody is compromised; from your best student to your worst student. –Dr. E, principal

The eight student participants in this study were referred to AHSDC for failing grades and truant and/or disruptive behavior. Some alternative schools have been called holding cells or dumping grounds for students (Dunbar, 1999). One hundred students with similar problems attending this same school could have been an educational nightmare. However, this was not the case. Fights were uncommon, and a simple walk through the hallways showed engaged students exhibiting positive behaviors. A stranger visiting this building would not know this was an alternative school. When Mr. Joe founded AHSDC, he chose the location on the outskirts of town away from public bus lines, other schools, local businesses, and other distractions. Location has been an important factor in shaping this school's environment and culture.

Location and Building Structure

Ms. Karla shared in her interview that the location of AHSDC had a lot to do with supporting an environment where students could not skip classes. Students had to stay the duration of the school day, because they were literally miles away from bus lines.

Many students mentioned during their interviews that they were able to defy traditional school rules easily. However, at AHSDC this was not possible, due to the small environment and building structure. AHSDC was built so that the principal could stand in the atrium and view the entire school. Mr. Carlos, the school's social worker, mentioned that AHSDC's structure

included rules, accountability, and an environment that helped students demonstrate positive behavior, even though they were initially resentful:

Once they get here [AHSDC], the students try to challenge [the environment]. They deem it as and this is what they have shared with me: too much structure, uniform expectation, the environment is too small, and they can't get away with certain things. So they don't like any of that at first. Because, it wasn't like that [for them] before they got here. –Mr. Carlos, social worker

Rules were enforced in classrooms as well. Ms. Tracee described the main rule established in her math class, which was respect of others and the learning environment.

In my classroom the number one rule is to: respect the teaching, learning environment. We're secondary students so basically you should understand that if I'm up here teaching, then you should not be talking. You should be paying attention. If a student is explaining, or they're up there doing a problem [on the blackboard], then you should be quiet. Because you're giving them your respect and everybody's learning. If you don't do that, then you're hurting everyone who's trying to learn. –Ms. Tracee, math teacher

Stability

During the second student focus group, participants shared their lived experiences while attending AHSDC. One of our activities involved students writing down words that described their experiences at AHSDC. Tonya and Helena both mentioned the word “stable.” Helena explained how the stable, family-like environment of AHSDC contributed to her improving her attendance. At her traditional school, she missed 100 out of 180 days.

I don't have any interest in attending Prescott, Statue, Yellowstone or Hamilton High school at this moment. When I attended Yellowstone High, I missed 100 days out of 180 days of school. At AHSDC I don't have a chance for skipping because of the area and the stable place we are at. I'm not ready to go back to my comprehensive [traditional] high school at this moment. –Helena, 10th grader

Tonya explained that AHSDC was stable because she knew what to expect, and the school was consistent in its practices.

Like AHSDC is very stable like, nothing really changes. You know once you come here you kind of like learn everybody, you learn the environment, you learn your

surroundings. It's just stable. When you come to AHSDC, you go to this teacher you know how's it's gonna be. It's just like, very secure. Secure and just stable.
–Tonya, 11th grader

When interviewing students, I gave them a hypothetical situation of a suspended student from a traditional school. I then asked which alternative schools in the area they would recommend. All eight student participants said they would recommend AHSDC above the other schools because of the strict environment and care given by staff members. Raynard suggested AHSDC, because he felt this school possessed discipline that students like him often lacked, but needed.

‘Cause Saddle High School not nowhere you want to go. You don't get a diploma you get your GED from there. So that's out of the question. I mean Cillside [High] it depends on what your discipline is like. If you can do good with a lot of freedom or whatever, then ok. I would say AHSDC or Cillside [High]. But if you don't do good with having a lot of freedom and you just lackadaisical, you don't need to go to Cillside [High] because they give you too much freedom. So I would say go to AHSDC. –Raynard, 11th grader

Jocelyn explained that she needed a school like AHSDC to give her specific and consistent instructions, and to assist her in getting ready for the real world.

I chose to come here [AHSDC], because I knew that at a big school I was constantly skipping [Hamilton High]. There wasn't a lot of discipline. I was seen in the hallways during class and then that was just it. They let me do what I wanted. And I think it's [AHSDC] helpful for like more people who don't have discipline. Self-discipline I ain't really got it like that. Here at [AHSDC] we have like structure. They gonna tell you what to do, when to do it, how to do it and it will help you. And they help you for the real world too –Jocelyn, 12th grader

Uniforms

Students at AHSDC were required to wear uniforms daily that consisted of a white or black solid shirt, black bottoms, a belt, and black shoes. I witnessed certain students who came to school without belts being sent by teachers to the office. They would then have to pay Ms. Gabriella, administrative assistant, 25 cents for a thin rope to make a belt. They then had to pull

up their pants and put the belt on before returning to class. Ms. Brenda explained that AHSDC required students to wear uniforms as a way of preparing them for their future as professionals.

Ms. Brenda was quoted in the local newspaper as saying:

We tell our students, if you come [to school] out of uniform, you don't go to class. If you tried to go to work at McDonald's or as a postal worker and you didn't wear your uniform, what would happen? [You go home]. We try to hold them to the same standards here. –Ms. Brenda, community liaison

Correlate 2: Instructional Leadership/Visionary Leadership

The next correlate I tend to say is: *visionary leadership, they say instructional leadership*. You need somebody in there that's an instructional leader. Who knows what they're doing, or a visionary. A vision to me is about the future. What do you want your school to be? A mission statement is what you do every single day to get to that vision. So having a vision for what you want your school to be. Now, I'd like all my students to come here, feel good about themselves self-esteem wise, and to be able to go off to college. And yes I say college because there is a college for everyone. So before kids say they don't what to go to college, just find a college that's for you and you will want to attend. –Dr. E, principal

When Dr. E became principal at AHSDC, there was a shift in vision. AHSDC's initial focus was to help suspended/expelled students graduate from high school. With Dr. E's arrival, AHSDC was transformed into a school that sent students to college. Mr. Klein, the PE/health teacher, discussed the shift in improved behavior and higher GPAs after Dr. E's arrival. He stated that the average student GPA at the end of Mr. Joe's career was 1.4, and under Dr. E's leadership it was closer to 2.5.

Ms. Karla explained that the vision for AHSDC students has expanded:

Our kids are applying to college. In the past we've had maybe a couple of kids/ girls that would go to a college because Mr. Joe had built a relationship with a community college. He helped get a student in. Then maybe about 3 years later he'd get another student in. But last year we had kids going to [four year institutions]. I mean that's phenomenal for us. They [students] wouldn't be doing that without us. I know they wouldn't. –Ms. Karla, counselor liaison

Mr. Shaw shared that his most memorable moment as an educator at AHSDC was the

shift in students going to college. Yet he felt it took some time for the school to buy into Dr. E's vision.

When Dr. E first came I would say that the differences were dramatic and profound .I don't think that we the staff or the students responded to Dr. E's vision as quick as Dr. E wanted us to respond. I like the fact that I'm seeing more of our kids at least attempt college. But it's amazing how many kids will come up now and when I ask them what they're doing they'll say, well I'm working and I'm going to school, or I'm going to school and I'm working. So I guess I'm starting to think that given the population that were working with, I'm impressed with the fact that more the kids are at least trying to go to college. –Mr. Shaw, science teacher

Staff members were not the only ones who believed in Dr. E's vision of higher education; students embraced this vision as well. Helena shared that she had few aspirations to finish high school or attend college until after she attended AHSDC. Jocelyn stated that after she attended AHSDC, she realized the value of Black educators and applied to Historically Black Colleges and Universities.

I knew I wanted to go to college, but I think when I came here [AHSDC], I changed the college to a Historically Black College or University. The majority of kids here are black. So it's just like, more family oriented. And it's great to be around people that are like you. –Jocelyn, 12th grader

Correlate 3: High Expectations for All Students (and Staff)

The next correlate is *High expectations for students and staff*. Now they don't say staff, but, I do. Because I don't see how you can have high expectations for students and not teachers. We have expectations for students, but the staff, do whatever the hell they want? That's a problem. Having high expectations: following through, speaking to kids like a dad would. I recognize that they don't have that, so I give them what they don't get at home. I speak to them the same way that I speak to my own kids. And I have expectations for them that I do for my own kids. I'm not gonna expect anything from kids here, that I'm not gonna expect from my own kid period. –Dr. E, principal

Dr. E's High Expectations

Mr. Ray, when listing words that described Dr. E, stated that he “holds staff and students accountable” (see Appendices I and J). Dr. E had high expectations for his teachers to build a relationship with students and to be able to teach them subject matter effectively. Dr. E randomly went around to ask students who were the best and worst teachers at AHSDC and why. This gave students a voice regarding classroom teaching practices. One day during an observation, a male student was sent to the office to wait for his mother’s arrival. Dr. E. asked this student who the best teacher was and why. This student cited Ms. Lana as the best teacher who related to and cared for him, and Mr. Turner, who helped him understand math.

Dr. E would often tell students during rap sessions that they had experienced years of no expectations and were now resistant to the high expectations made of them at AHSDC. Veteran students realized, appreciated, and sought to reach these high expectations. Jack, who entered as an extremely disengaged student, discussed how AHSDC held students to high expectations:

I mean and they keep it real with you [at AHSDC]. Like you keep doing this you're going to end up here [prison or the grave]. If you don't like it then hit the road. So, it's really important to me that everybody's just so straight up here. –Jack, 10th grader

Individualized Educational Plans (IEPs): Expectation to Help Students

Almost half (49 percent) of the student population at AHSDC were labeled special education and had IEPs. During an interview, Dr. E mentioned Tonya, who came to AHSDC with an IEP for deficits in reading and writing. After two trimesters at AHSDC, she was re-tested and taken off her IEP. I asked Dr. E about this, and he said the goal was to support, give resources, and strengthen student’s skills so IEPs were not necessary.

That's the goal, to get students off [IEP]. I mean 40% of our population come with an IEP. Do they all deserve it? No. Some of it is a mixture of laziness, some of it is: I'm used to having an IEP. Some of it is: well my son/daughter needs protections. What protections do you get from an IEP? None. Zero. Zero. –Dr. E, principal

AHSDC's Expectations: Beyond High School

Ms. Adrienne mentioned that in the past AHSDC was seen as a dumping ground and a place to simply remove disruptive students from traditional schools. Now, AHSDC had an academic focus:

Yeah it [AHSDC] was actually called the school for troubled youth. Yeah that actually was its name. They didn't want them [students] in the other [traditional] buildings. We were dumping grounds and we still are the dumping grounds. But now we're the dumping grounds with an academic flair to it. You're getting dumped here, but you're going to achieve here, you're not putting your head down in class. –Ms. Adrienne, science teacher

Ms. Lana discussed how AHSDC's expectations had increased toward college attendance. AHSDC students' college acceptance letters were placed in frames and hung on the wall near the main office.

And over the years since I've been teaching here I have noticed that we're getting more and more students going to college. When I first came here, like the first three or four years I was here, it was like we were just happy to get them to graduate from high school. But more and more, I see Dr. E really pushes to see those acceptance letters from universities and colleges. And so this is a good thing, it's a good thing. –Ms. Lana, English teacher

Each year Dr. E and Ms. Brenda would take 11th and 12th grade students on campus visits to local and out of state colleges/universities. During a mid-winter break, they took five students, including Yeltsin and Martin, to a university 120 miles away from the Arcadia School district.

Below were Yeltsin's thoughts about the college visit:

Like, I was like happy. I don't regret going [on the college visit]. Like it was like an experience factor. Just because you're going to visit doesn't mean you're going there [to

college]. So I don't regret going. It was my first time in college. So that's good. I got to see like how big they are and how many students go there. –Yeltsin, 12th grader

Correlate 4: Student Time on Task and Opportunity to Learn

The next correlate is *Students' time on task and opportunity to learn*. As I go around my school and other schools I'm looking for student's time on task. What they're doing when they're in class? What's their opportunity to learn? In the past I used to make P.A. announcements at all different times. Whenever I felt like it, and realized that could be a problem and a disruption to students who have a hard time concentrating. –Dr. E, principal

Since AHSDC students were lacking in academic skills/foundations, having been allowed to fail for the past six to eight years, in-class time at AHSDC was crucial. Ms. Tracee, a math teacher, said that some students, when they first arrived at AHSDC, were accustomed to being disruptive in order to disengage academically. She said when students realized that AHSDC rules and staff were consistent, they sat down and engaged in the learning process.

You'll get some students who are really hostile or volatile, loud and you know disruptive. Here [at AHSDC] we're going to say to them, wait a minute, nope that's not even going to work, sit down and do this work. So a lot of them they end up going through a whole little process, like wow, it's different here. I have to do my work. And you begin to see the students' transition. –Ms. Tracee, math teacher

Each class at AHSDC was 70 minutes, on block scheduling. Tonya, who struggled with attendance, stated the following about her first impression of AHSDC classes: "...My first day here I was like these classes are long as hell, oh my god the classes was dreadful. I was like, will we ever get out? I was not used to that..."

When asked how students described her as a science teacher, Ms. Adrienne said she was a taskmaster for the whole 70 minutes of class.

Probably pretty stern. Pretty stern. Yeah, a taskmaster, you know you gotta stay on task. You don't go backwards. I have 70 some odd minutes with these folks and I have to keep them entertained from the time they walk in, to the time they leave. I start my day on the chalkboard with the daily assignment. While I am taking attendance and getting myself set up with the computer, they should be doing an assignment for the daily. And

then I'm having a lecture. And then we'll have a video associated with lecture. –Ms. Adrienne, science teacher

Ms. Lana stated that it was important to understand where students were coming from economically and their lack of access to technology. This awareness influenced the way she facilitated and planned her classes. For example, she often had students type their assignments and papers during class because many of them had no computers at home.

The problem is, students are not taking the time at home. Part of it is some of them don't have viable computers at home. When they get home they're not gonna work on the paper. All my essays and things, they do a beautiful job because we go to the library or get the computers from the lab cart. I make sure they do their work. And then I sit down with them. I usually proofread and I sit down with them. I tell them where the mistakes are. Then I tell them now run back into the computer lab and make the corrections. –Ms. Lana, English teacher

Jocelyn recalled when she first arrived at AHSDC. Dr. E confronted her in the hallway and told her she would be kicked out of AHSDC if she did not get on task. As observed, Dr. E would address students specifically who did not meet AHSDC's academic expectations.

So when I got here [AHSDC], I had to get in the groove of things. I couldn't skip, like there's nowhere you can skip here. I wasn't doing anything like the work that I should've been doing. I was going through the motions of school. So Dr. E he threatened me he said: You're gonna have to go somewhere else, you're coming from Hamilton High you doing the same thing, we don't need that here. And I said, I was like you gonna kick me out? And I was like I'm not even bad. Bad people get kicked out [of school]. He was like that doesn't matter, you're not doing what you said you're going to be doing. I was like oh my God, no there's no way I'm getting kicked out. He can't kick me out. So, I got on my A game. –Jocelyn, 12th grader

Correlate 5: Ongoing Assessments /Monitoring of Student Progress

Ongoing Assessment is usually my next correlate... –Dr. E, principal

Dr. E believed in consistent and on-going assessment. Periodically during rap sessions, Dr. E would read grades aloud in front of the entire school. For those students doing well, this was a time of positive acknowledgement. For those who were not, this was a time for reflection

on changes necessary to improve grades. No student cried or became visibly upset in this process. They seemed to accept Dr. E's words as ones coming from a caring father. I found it amazing the words he used, even for students who were failing. He just did not inform them they were failing, but told them they could and should be doing better. Below are some of his phrases that caught my attention: "You are too smart for these grades." "You can do better." "I expect more from you." His comments held each student accountable to his or her personal ability. When he and I debriefed this rap session's grade discussion, Dr. E responded as follows:

Yes, absolutely, I read grades aloud. And that's not the only thing, I have reading scores as well. I look at how well our kids are doing, it's up there [points to the wall]. I look at reading scores to see how our kids are doing. I looked at the Tank Test, the Tank is a precursor to the ACT. I looked and saw what our average was, it was like 15 or 16. So I couldn't be happy about that, but you have to know where you are with students' grades and test scores. –Dr. E, principal

When I interviewed Yeltsin, he stated that his favorite rap sessions were when Dr. E reviewed grades of the student body. Yeltsin always had a positive report of grades, yet said it was humorous when Dr. E would ask students how they were failing gym.

Mentorship Groups

At the beginning of each trimester, Dr. E met with each student to review that progress and create individual goals. Mentorship groups met bi-weekly on Wednesday mornings, and they were another way that staff helped students monitor academic progress. Each group contained 10 students or less. Staff members served as mentors and facilitators of each group. At the end of each trimester, the mentorship group with the highest collective GPA would win a dinner together at the restaurant of their choice.

Classrooms

In the classroom, Mr. Turner stated that he used progress reports to keep students and parents/guardians informed about academic performance.

Every parent that I called has been very receptive. I always have a strong parent-teacher relationship and rapport with them. One thing that I do, is when I give the weekly progress reports, I require that the parents sign them to show that they've seen it. Yeah and I hold them accountable for that too. So they can't say that they don't know what was going on [with their child]. –Mr. Turner, math teacher

Correlate 6: Home – School Relationships

The next correlate is **Home-School Relationships** and as a principal, at every school I've gone to, the correlate that we are having the least success, was home school relationships. Schools and home just aren't connecting. So I try to do it here, but I'm sure it could be better. But you have a lot of parents here that are disengaged with the academic process. Black folks tend to drop their kids off at school, and then they expect the school to educate them and they don't do anything else. And that's why when you talk about an achievement gap that's one of the reasons. Black parents are not active enough in schools, in their kid's schooling. –Dr. E principal

AHSDC: Generations of Students

Ms. Karla mentioned that AHSDC was a school of generations. It was not uncommon to have a student whose mother, father, or siblings had attended AHSDC; there was kinship within the school. Often times, after parents realized AHSDC was a great school for their child, they would recommend the school to other family members who would also request admittance.

Ms. Brenda, the community liaison, worked closely with families to support student success. She helped AHSDC students to ensure that they were held accountable, both as students and as citizens.

Yes and that's where my job came in as community liaison. There had to be a link between the school and the community, 'cause we're all together. I always say it, it was the community that helped my children get where they are. That's what we try to do now [in AHSDC] just hold them accountable for everything done in school, home and community. You can't just do whatever you want. It's more than getting good grades,

you know? A con artist can get good grades, but that doesn't make what they're doing okay. –Ms. Brenda, community liaison

AHSDC Staff, Parents/Guardians and Community

One day a student came to school after a doctor's appointment. After he signed in, Ms. Gabriella, administrative assistant, asked him how he was doing. He said better, but that he had been mean to his mom that morning and felt bad. Ms. Gabriella told him to pick up the phone, call and tell his mom he was sorry, and that he loved her. The student did just that, sincerely. This showed me how closely staff were to parents/guardians and families.

Ms. Tracee added that it was important to understand that AHSDC parents cared about their children. She believed that some parents truly did not know how to help their child with homework. When educators respected parents, it made it easier for teacher-parent collaboration.

You have a different dynamic of a parent. It's not that these parents don't love their kids, or don't want to help them with their homework, they just don't know how. And a lot of them [parents] weren't successful in school so they shun away from it [school]. –Ms. Tracee, math teacher

Mr. Turner shared at the beginning of the school year that he always made an effort to call every parent/guardian, to initiate open communication. He believed it was important for students to understand that he was working with their families collectively for their success.

When school first starts, I always make it a point to call the parent, just to set the tone by introducing myself, and touching base to let them know we're working together, we're a team. We both have the best interest of your son and daughter at hand. And I'm looking forward to having a good school year. So I start off that way. That makes it easier for me to call the second time or third time if there is a problem. Initially, you do that and it also sends a message to the kid that, oh this guy calls [home]. So if I get out of line he's probably likely to call my mom or dad. –Mr. Turner, math teacher

Family Support

Jack shared how AHSDC had supported his family on multiple occasions. Specifically when faced with homelessness, he stated AHSDC helped save his family.

I was recently evicted from my house. I thought I was going to be homeless until Mr. Shaw found out and brought it up in a staff meeting. A couple days later Mr. Klein was talking to my mom about moving us into a house he had rented. Without AHSDC I'd be homeless, on the streets wasting my life (sniff). If I were at Prescott High, none of my teachers would've even known about this issue, because the size of the classroom and amount of students that they have. With a small school like AHSDC I was able to develop a relationship with my teachers that saved my family (sniffs). –Jack, 10th grader

All students and parents/guardians were given staff members' cell phone numbers and email addresses to stay in close contact. AHSDC's open house was mandatory for parents/guardians, and report cards were never mailed, but instead were required to be picked up.

Correlate 7: Clear School Mission

A clear, recitable ***School Mission*** is the final correlate. Most don't know their school mission when it's right in front of them. Everything I do is about making sure that the student has a good work ethic, a positive attitude and a strong skill set. But it's not like I can do it myself. You have to have buy-in [from students and staff]. –Dr. E, principal

The school mission at AHSDC was “*All students will develop the attitude, skill set, and work ethic to immediately become productive, valued citizens.*” Ms. Lana, as did other staff members, explained to students the importance of being prepared for the real world. She stated during an interview that students had to understand that they have to receive further education to be marketable in society.

You have more options in life if you have that college degree, as opposed to somebody who just has a high school diploma. You'll be more marketable. People will say you're a college graduate. I tell my African American students, there's not a rich uncle who's going to die and leave you \$1 million to start a business. You're gonna have to scuffle for yourself, and the more education you have the more options. You will have far more options when you have an education. If not, you're gonna be at the bottom of the barrel. Like I tell students in rap session, people don't respect you if you're ignorant. –Ms. Lana, English teacher

Ms. Brenda discussed that she believed in AHSDC's mission for increased life chances:

I said it when I started working here: I stay here in Arcadia so that these kids don't get stuck here. 'Cause it's so easy to get stuck. So that's why I do it and I love it. I do, I love my kids, you know I love my kids. The ability to change the student's life. That's the strength. You can change their life through education. Education is your escape, you know with the education you have options, you have choices. -Ms. Brenda, community liaison

At the end of the year, there were two *Students of the Year* awards given to the male and female student who exhibited the most positive attitudes, strongest skill set, and highest work ethic. Nina, a participant from this study, was the female student awarded. She was given a beautifully framed certificate and a gift card.

THEME 3:

CULTURALLY RELEVANT INTERACTIONS

I think the greatest problem in schools is your basic cultural divide, especially for the males. I think the research shows pretty well what happens with mostly White women teaching mostly African-American youth. And what those cultural clashes are. –Mr. Ray, English teacher

Cultural Disconnections

The above quote from Mr. Ray discussed his beliefs that students of color, especially Black students, often experience a cultural disconnection in traditional schools. Another teacher, Ms. Tracee, also asserted that her students had experienced cultural disconnections prior to attending AHSDC. Ms. Tracee believed that due to this cultural divide, White teachers often were unable to teach Black male students because they feared them.

Well you know we're [AHSDC] just more on top of it. And majority of teachers are White females [in traditional schools]. These big, Black males can intimidate these White females and they're afraid of them. And they can just go do what they want, and the teacher's afraid. And every time students don't understand something, they can act up so much that they get away with not doing the work. But here [AHSD], a lot of times we, have a lot of problems in the beginning with kids. Because they think that's gonna work here and it doesn't. I'm not afraid of you. You're still gonna sit down, do your work, and you're not gonna talk to me any kind of way. Because I'm not gonna have it. You know? So get it together. And I think they [students] always fight us, for like the first year. And then after that, they kind of realize okay, this is not gonna work. –Ms. Tracee, math teacher

Ms. Brenda expressed that schools as an institution have taught Black students they are inferior to White students; and if students were unable to process this as a myth, they began to internalize the inferiority.

My opinion is that school is where you're taught. If you're Black, you're taught to be inferior. And if you're White, you are literally taught to be superior. You know what I mean? So in the educational arena that's really, that's all you see from the very beginning. Well I'll say from fourth-grade on up you see this constantly. So I'm not even mad at

Black people, because I understand that's all they know and have been taught. It's a vicious cycle. –Mrs. Brenda, community liaison

Student Focus Group 1: Stories of Cultural Disconnections Prior to AHSDC

Prior to this study, my suppositions were that there was value in allowing the inclusion of identities in the classroom (Kohl, 1994; Ladson-Billings, 2009). Interestingly enough, each student participant, when discussing their journey prior to attendance at AHSDC, recounted discrimination and bias based on their race, class, gender, or language. Jack, the only White student, mentioned racism that he had witnessed in his schools. During our first focus group, students participated in an activity in which they discussed stereotypes they had experienced or witnessed in their traditional schools.

Yeltsin stated that teachers would mimic him and make light of the fact that he was an English language learner:

There was this White teacher, and I guess he thought that I couldn't speak English. So I would just sit in his classroom. He would try to talk to me in Spanish. I mean if it was in a good way, I wouldn't care, but he was making fun of me. Like if he was trying to talk to me in Spanish, like in a good way, then I wouldn't mind. Like he'd [teacher] try to talk real slow in Spanish, in a way that he try to make fun of me. –Yeltsin, 12th grader

Jack recounted mistreatment of his Black classmates by a White teacher in his traditional school. He stated that this teacher had a history of being racially insensitive toward students.

Two students were walking down the hall and the [white] teacher stopped them. He asked the Black kid if they were both in the same class. 'Cause the White kid I think had down syndrome. And the Black kid he was in regular Ed. I think he was a grade above me or two grades above me. But he was just walking him to go to the bathroom, 'cause like, they have this buddy system thing. He was walking him back from the bathroom. This teacher like made a comment and was like basically telling him [Black student], like you need to go back in the special ed room. I just walked past him and he [teacher] had a surprised look on his face. Like I don't think he thought anybody was around or anything to hear him. –Jack, 10th grader

Raynard shared an experience about when he and his junior high friends dressed alike and were accused of and punished for being part of a gang.

Man, so one day you know me and my brother, we was like tomorrow everybody wear you know a hoodie. Yo favorite color. We would just do stuff to make the school interesting. We never had like a spirit day or whatever, school was so boring. So one day everybody, we did a hoodie thing or whatever and me and my brother have matching black Oklahoma Raiders hoodies. So we wore both of those and we had like black hats that matched. But soon as we walked in [school], like an hour later I was in the office with the police officer. They called my mom. They're [school staff] like we're calling your mom. They called her and were like your son's involved in a gang. –Raynard, 11th grader

Jocelyn remembered being treated differently by a White teacher at a young age:

I remember my kindergarten teacher she was white and mean. Very mean. I just feel like I would go up to her and asked her stuff and she be like, oh sit down. She just wouldn't help me, with whatever I needed help with, but would help others. –Jocelyn, 12th grader

Cultural Relevancy

AHSDC was unique because culture was discussed daily with students. Ladson-Billings (2009) argued that teachers need to acknowledge the culture of their students, be aware of their stereotypical perceptions, and use the child's culture as a reference and point of empowerment. This is known as Cultural Relevancy, or Culturally Relevant teaching practices.

Ladson-Billings (2009) explains that cultural relevancy has three aspects:

1. Teacher's conception of self and others
2. Classroom social interaction
3. Teacher's conceptions of knowledge.

I will discuss broadly how AHSDC students' and staff members' lived experiences contain culturally relevant interactions.

Aspect 1: Conception of Self and Others (Seeing Color and Seeing Culture)

Under Cultural Relevancy Aspect One, I include the following:

A. Teachers believe all students can succeed

B. Teachers help students make connections between their community, national and global identities (Ladson-Billings, 2009, p. 38).

Teachers Believe All Students Can Succeed

Schools as institutions often hold the same stereotypes and bias as society. Individualistic attitudes and social efficiency are rooted in schools' daily practices (Labaree, 1997). However, this was not the case at AHSDC. The majority of students entered with GPAs below 1.0. However, AHSDC teachers, from day one, established relationships with students and believed in their achievement. Mr. Turner stated that he believed all students could learn and do well in school, yet some needed coaching and motivation.

I feel that every student has the ability to learn, every student has the same right to learn. And regardless of, I mean any type of background, race, gender any of that, I don't really buy that notion. They say some kids can't do this. I believe in the kids. I believe in pushing them to maximize their potential. To see that in the case of math, that math isn't as hard as they think it is. I mean don't get me wrong, it's still gonna be hard and overwhelming for some people, but my goal is to at least ease up some of that anxiety, if not all of it. And to just help them, so that they can compete in the real world. –Mr. Turner, math teacher

Dr. E discussed how he believed in AHSDC's students, just as he believed in his own biological sons. He invested in AHSDC students and viewed their success as his own.

I believe in having high expectations, following through, speaking to kids like a dad would. I recognize that they don't have that, so I give them what they don't get at home. I feel that, I give to them and I speak to them the same way that I speak to my own kids. And I have expectations for them that I do for my own kids. I'm not gonna expect anything from the kids here that I'm not gonna expect from my own kids, period. –Dr. E, principal

One student experiencing “senioritis” shared that Dr. E would not accept less than his personal best. This student recalled how he rushed in taking a statewide reading test. Dr. E confronted him during a rap session and challenged him to re-take the test because he had done well on this same test the prior trimester.

During the second week in May, he [Dr. E] had the school take a reading test. And I remember I took the test, but I thought if I just rushed through it to get it over with, I will be okay. But Dr. E was not about to let that happen. He let me know in front of everyone [at rap session] it was unacceptable, that he believed in me. And he knew I could do better, because there was no way my scores could decline. He was challenging me to meet the high expectations that he sets for all students. Which was leave out of AHSDC with all the skills we need to be successful in the community. And with that challenge, I retook the test and showed that I was on grade level, like Dr. E knew I was. –AHSDC student at board meeting

Ms. Tracee believed that part of teaching students effectively is understanding that everyone learns differently. It was a teacher’s responsibility to meet students’ individual learning styles.

I do feel, that kids learn in different ways. And this allows you to do a variety of different things to teach division to students. Because maybe they get it when they do hands on applications. When they see it, you know? Actually dividing it up, you know? Or you give them a big thing of candy or something and they have to divide this up. Some people learn better like that. And the kids get a more in depth understanding of it when you use their learning style. My daughter is one of those types of students with a different learning style. –Mr. Tracee, math teacher.

Teachers Help Students Make Connections Between Their Community...Global Identities

Media Center. The media center (former library) was the most diverse library I have ever seen in a public school. They had a plethora of multicultural books, including Asian, Indian, Native American, African American, Jewish, Hispanic/Latino, and African cultures. There were books about colleges, government, science, business, fashion, and novels. There were six

computers and two printers in the media center. The artwork displayed included a picture of Supreme Court Justice Thurgood Marshall.

Rap Sessions. Bi-weekly rap sessions were another venue for staff and students to discuss culture. Students watched films based on Tuskegee airmen and collectively read a chapter from Langston Hughes, “The Ways of White Folks.” Rap session topics included guest speakers such as Mr. Randolph, a former Freedom Rider, and Dr. E’s father, who discussed race and World War II, and Ms. Coral, a former civil rights activist.

Staff Members and Culture. Ms. Brenda identified herself as an alpha, Black female. She joked that every February during Black History Month, she would get in trouble with parents for talking too candidly about racism. Following her comment during a rap session that there is still modern day slavery in the U.S., an upset parent complained to the administration. Ms. Brenda explained that AHSDC placed importance on discussing race because student identities are salient and cannot be ignored.

I think that we are very open and frank when we talk about race here [AHSDC], because it's real life. When our students go out into the world, they're going to have people treat them a certain way because of the color of their skin. They're going to have people treat them a certain way because of where they live. All these different things come into play, so why in school do we pretend that's not a part of real life? So, I think we do a good job of preparing students of this, this is, what you're going to have to face. I don't have time to sugarcoat it. This is real life. This is what's going to happen when you leave out of these [AHSDC] doors. –Mrs. Brenda, community liaison

Ms. Karla understood that because Black students experienced racism daily in society, they needed nurturing in schools.

I look at it as a haven for kids that need extra nurturing. And that is one of the things that I've liked about this school. One of the strengths has been that it is a haven for Black kids. It is a place where they feel at home, [even though] it's not technically for Black kids. –Ms. Karla, counselor liaison.

Ms. Lana believed AHSDC students benefited from having black teachers:

Our kids need it, they need black teachers that they can identify with, and that care about them. They need that. When they go over to Prescott [High] and they just see one or two or three, [Black teachers] they don't get to identify with them. So they're surrounded by white folks all the time. Surrounded. And for African-American students, that's not necessarily a good thing. –Ms. Lana, English Teacher

Students and Culture. Student participants did not use the term “Cultural Relevancy” during interviews and focus groups, yet they felt these practices in AHSDC. During the second focus group, students discussed how AHSDC had taught them it was a “White man’s world.” Helena stated that it was not a White man’s world because God is not White. However, Jocelyn believed teachers discussed race because this was pertinent information needed to function in the real world.

I think like when Mr. Shaw be talking about, like they [society] really don't care [about us]. It’s like a White man's world. I think that it’s good for him to be saying that to us. Because it like puts the reality in our face, that you’re Black, it's a White man's world. They’re not going to care about you in the real world. –Jocelyn, 12th grader

One of the classrooms I observed was Mr. Clark’s U.S. history course. The topic that day was the “Reconstruction Era: Post-Slavery Abolishment in the United States.” Students had an enlightening conversation on why they had not learned or discussed this topic before that time. The students concluded that society did not always share history correctly, as a way to disempower minority groups.

Aspect 2: Social Relations (We Are Family)

Under Cultural Relevancy Aspect Two, I will include the following:

A. The teacher-student relationship is fluid, humanely equitable, and it extends to interactions beyond the classroom and into the community.

B. Teachers demonstrate a connectedness to all students (Ladson-Billings, 2009, p. 60).

Teacher-Student Relationship is Fluid, Humanely Equitable... into the Community

Students at AHSDC all had supportive parents. All student participants lived with their mothers only, with the exceptions of Marcus, who lived with his grandparents, and Nina, who lived with her mother and step-father. Nina and Yeltsin's fathers lived in the Dominican Republic and Mexico, respectively, and Jake never mentioned his biological father. Though students had family support, AHSDC served as a second family.

School Family. As soon as you walk into AHSDC, the sign that greets you on the wall is "Welcome to AHSDC's Family." Family was a theme that all student and staff participants mentioned and experienced. During interviews and focus groups, students stated that they felt as if AHSDC staff members were like parents, aunts, uncles, and grandparents. Jocelyn described the relationships between AHSDC staff and students as one of a normal, caring family:

Staff to students, basically it is a family because they care about us and they want us to succeed obviously. But like student to student, like we are as much as we can be a family. Yeah 'cause you know these cliques or whatever, like at the regular school. But for the most part it's like how it is now, how we're all fighting for AHSDC [to stop closure]. We're obviously now closer together as a family. And I think maybe sometimes that's what it takes, something this important to bring us all together. Like okay, I cussed you out the other day but today, we're gonna make these signs together [to protest school closure]. –Jocelyn, 12th grader

Jack stated that each AHSDC classroom was a family of its own, with the teacher as the parent. However, this family extended outside of the classroom and beyond school hours.

I love Ms. Brenda 'cause our families are close. Mr. Frank is like an older brother to me, 'cause when I first came here [AHSD] I didn't have any friends. I didn't know anybody, and I started talking about skateboarding with him. I didn't even know he liked skateboarding and so we hung out one day. So that was cool, but me and him also we joke around. Dr. E tries to be everybody's father. Mr. Shaw is like a grandpa. The only reason I think about him as a grandpa is because, he'll just keep it real in itself, like family. Ms. Lana, because I go to church with her sometimes. I don't know, she'll tell me

straight up, you doing wrong, you need to do this instead of what you are doing, right now. –Jack, 10th grader

Martin shared that AHSDC was his family after he lost his parents. He stated Dr. E and Mr. Turner were his fathers and Ms. Brenda was an individual he could call on at any time. He explained they had earned the title of family for being accessible to him beyond school.

He [Dr. E] just said he gonna be there for me. He gonna be there when I graduate, he gonna be there when I get married, he gonna be there when I'm chilling on the beach. Anything like that, you know? So it's like, he said he gonna be there whenever, every event that I am in. He gonna be there. I believe him. I trust him, and I don't trust because of my past. I can call Ms. Brenda anytime of the day and be like, you know I'm stuck here, need you to come get me. Can I come over and stay the night? She'd be like okay. And then that's it. Mr. Turner, he been there for me for the longest. I remember calling him on the phone with you know, my little sister in the background crying and stuff, while I'm trying to do work. He still stayed on the phone talking. That's my pops too. Dr. E pointed something out to me. I told him I was like, I didn't ask you to be my father. My father's dead, he said yeah you right but, now you get to choose who you want to be a father. And I didn't really get that at first, but now I do. –Martin, 12th grader

Tonya expressed that staff members at AHSDC were family members who offered wisdom and looked out for her best interest:

Ms. Tracee, 'cause she's like a mom to me. She reminds me a lot of my mom. I don't know, we just clicked together. She just looks out, I can tell she really cares. She's like my mom here. She's like the school mom, so I love her. Ms. Lana she's very wise, she's like a great aunt. I don't want to say a grandma (laughs). She just looks out, she's very wise and experienced, so I would listen to her. I love Ms. Brenda 'cause if it wasn't for Ms. Brenda, I wouldn't gotten in here. 'Cause at AHSDC they accept people here and they will deny you. Why? Probably just looking at my [bad] attendance records. –Tonya, 11th grader

It was not uncommon to hear staff members at AHSDC mention that students had called them early in the morning, informing them they had missed the bus and had no ride to school. Staff members would pick them up for school to help them meet attendance requirements. When students became ill, staff would accompany the parents and students to the doctor's office or

hospital, AHSDC staff members would also support students who had concerts, sports events, plays, or other extracurricular activities at their traditional school by attending those events.

Mr. Turner asserted that to be an effective teacher, he viewed his job as a ministry:

I mean teaching is more than just a job, it's a ministry. You know, I've dealt with the teachers that just, came to do the job. They just approached their job by showing up, doing their job and then going home or whatever. There is more to it, you know? I mean I care about the kids enough to try to be that third-party in their ear. Like what [your] mom and dad are telling you is no joke. It is gonna be rough out there. It is gonna hurt to get rejected by school after school, if you don't do what you need to do. And so I'm trying to motivate them, I'm trying. And I'm also trying to use creative ways to help build their self-esteem especially in math, a subject that's otherwise challenging to most people. –Mr. Turner, math teacher

Teachers Demonstrate a Connectedness to All Students

Dr. E explained that AHSDC was different from other schools because they connected students, staff, communities, and parents. He discussed that this collaboration was necessary to support students from all angles: inside school, in the community, and at home.

Absolutely. That's what makes us [AHSDC] different, the why and the how. Most of our kids here have had pretty poor experiences in their family life. Something, somewhere is not working. I would say lack of the presence of a father has impacted every kid here. Even if your father's in the house. Somewhere along the line he [the father] hasn't been doing what he's supposed to be doing. I mean that is very important to establish relationships with them [students]. Here we can't just be involved during school, because a lot of the problems that occur are happening outside the school. So the school is working with their family, mothers, fathers working with them and kind of triangulating; making sure the parents, the school, the kid, all are communicating. -Dr. E, principal

Mr. Shaw, Mr. Ray, Mr. Klein, and Mr. Turner mentioned that they had struggled in their own schooling and were able to relate to AHSDC students. Mr. Shaw explained how he was similar to AHSDC students:

When I came here, it seemed like the right fit for me. I mean I like the structure, being able to mess [joke] with the kids. As far as their academic behavior and their behavior in the classroom, they're very similar to who I was as a child. I was somewhat different than

our students. I knew when to shut up, I knew. I was still getting in trouble, but I didn't get suspended or expelled. Well, I was asked to leave one school after the seventh grade. I was asked to be put in a different school. –Mr. Shaw, science teacher

Ms. Lana described her relationship with students as one of collective ownership; one where both student and teacher goals were intertwined for student achievement.

Well what I try to do is, try to let them know that “*we’re in this together*” and if you want a B in this class, okay let's work toward it. That's the grade we’re gonna get. You can do it, and I encourage them. -Ms. Lana, English teacher

Ladson Billings (2009) stated that some educators believe in treating all students the same; this is problematic. Mr. Klein explained that he would not treat students the same because they were individuals with different needs.

You know it's hard to say. It depends on each group of students you work with, my philosophy is actually trying to get the best out of the student. No matter what type of background or where they came from. And because every student’s different, I treat every student differently. I don't treat every student the same. No matter the color, background or home life environment, whatever. Everybody's not the same -Mr. Klein, PE/health teacher

Aspect 3: Conceptions of Knowledge (Tree of Knowledge)

Under Cultural Relevancy Aspect Three I will include the following:

A. Knowledge is viewed critically

B. Teachers help students develop necessary skills (Ladson-Billings, 2009, p. 89).

Knowledge is Viewed Critically

Dr. E mentioned that he would use rap session activities to ensure that students were thinking critically about important issues.

I take them [students] out of their comfort zone, and I go back to my teaching days. Things that I used to do when I was a teacher, I do as a principal. That’s a clear example of one of the things I did. Get kids to think a little more critically. Compare and contrast what they learn from historical perspectives. You can get anything you want from a kid, as long as your relationship is good, they know where they stand, and you expect

something from them. If you don't expect something from kids, you won't get it. –Dr. E, principal

One school-wide assignment given by Dr. E was a critical analysis paper and dialogue on the 2012 film *Red Tails* and the 1995 film *Tuskegee Airmen*. Students watched both films and then were given seven questions to answer. The questions focused on the significance of both films, the historical background, and overall student perceptions of which film presented a more realistic account. During the preceding rap session dialogue, Dr. E stated he felt like he was at a prep school. He later explained, it was due to the caliber of answers from students. He was excited that students were engaged and thinking critically.

True knowledge was defined by some educators as teaching students to be able to teach others. Ms. Tracee shared “My philosophy as a teacher has always been to teach students to teach themselves.” Mr. Turner stated the following was important: “Helping them build concepts to explain their own work; have them teach and explain to the class what they did.”

Teachers Help Students Develop Necessary Skills

AHSDC students often entered this school with low skills and numerous learning gaps from years of being simply passed through the educational system. Nina remembered that in traditional schools, teachers would only help the majority, meaning if most students had an understanding or knowledge of material they would move on to the next lesson.

They [traditional schools], I mean it was just a lot of liberty. Because the classes were too big or whatever, basically like they [teachers] didn't care if you get it. They just move on, and I mean I need help. Basically when the majority of students say yeah we get it or whatever, then we just move on. They wouldn't stop for just one person. That is really deep and I don't know how to swim. I was dying girl [in traditional schools], oh my goodness. –Nina, 11th grader

AHSDC was then given the task of filling these gaps and then moving students up to grade level or beyond. Ms. Tracee stated that the academic gaps of entering students at AHSDC caused teachers to have to review old material to strengthen foundational knowledge.

Kids now they have so many holes [in their learning]. And when they get stuck and they can't go home and have their parents help them, they do shut down. They start trying to do the work, and it's too hard because they didn't get those basics. And they [students] just say forget it. I'm not doing this. And they think they're dumb and things like that. You know? That's what makes math so hard. Math is probably your easiest class, because math doesn't change; if you know the foundation [skills]. –Ms. Tracee, math teacher

Mr. Shaw discussed the type of skills he wanted AHSDC students to gain. These skills were similar to his expectations for his biological sons:

Well, what I would tell my students, is that I want them to be able to do the same things when they graduate from high school that I expected of my sons. So I said they need to be able to read beyond grade level, write beyond grade level, think, use a computer. I say if you can do those things then you can be successful. No matter what their grades are, if they decide to go to college now or later they've got the skills they need. -Mr. Shaw, science teacher

AHSDC's Own Culture

When staff members discussed students in general, they usually mentioned Black or African Americans, because this population was the majority at AHSDC. However, I observed staff members' interactions with non-Black students, and they held the same love and care. AHSDC had its own culture of family, inclusive of all students, regardless of race, class, or gender. There were no outcasts at this school. When rap sessions focused on race or even Black history topics, non-Black students participated intently. It was clear when non-Black students and parent/guardians spoke about AHSDC and its staff; they appreciated the love, honesty, care, and family-like atmosphere.

THEME 4:

WARM DEMANDERS

I mean all the other high schools, all the teachers would be like: oh no it's okay you failed this [test], but you'll get it next time. Like the teachers here [AHSDC] will be like no you're staying after school, you're gonna redo this, and you're gonna, YOU'RE GONNA graduate. –Jack, 10th grader

The above quote from Jack explained the difference between AHSDC and traditional schools. At the core, he expressed that failure was not an option. For example, if an AHSDC student failed a test, teachers would stay after school to help the student master the material. “Tough love” was a common phrase used by student participants to express the school’s approach to helping students succeed.

Tough Love

Raynard and Jack mentioned the term “tough love.” They explained that students were resistant when they first arrived at AHSDC, because they had never experienced the duality of this concept:

I say they [AHSDC] disciplines us with tough love because, most of the males in here don't have a father. They don't know what tough love is. So a teacher showing them something like that is new. Our teachers show us tough love, and they [students] get it [understand the concept] later on in life. That's just how I see it. –Raynard, 11th grader

Jack believed that when he was disciplined by Dr. E or staff members, they were showing love and appreciation toward him as a person:

Yeah Dr. E, I think he's a really good principal. Because he treats everybody the same. As he would've, if they were his daughter or son. People don't understand what tough love is because that's like his main way that he gets them to learn what they're doing is wrong. I'm thinking well, like okay, he must have some kind of love or appreciation for me as a person to actually be telling me these things. 'Cause when I was at my other school they just told me to leave. They didn't tell me, ok look you can't be doing this stuff, it's only going to lead you to trouble. They just told me to get out. –Jack, 10th grader

Warm Demanders

Educators who care about their students, yet insist they meet disciplinary and academic expectations, are known as Warm Demanders. The term was first coined by Kleinfeld (1972), to describe a teacher who effectively taught Indian and Eskimo youth through active demandingness and personal warmth. AHSDC staff members were warm demanders to the core. Components of being a warm demander included building deliberate relationships, clear and consistent expectations, communicating an expectation of success, supporting positive behavior, using consequences to enforce expectations, viewing misbehavior as a puzzle, providing learning supports, and insisting beyond believing (Bondy and Ross, 2008; Ross et al., 2008). Below are the voices of students and staff describing how warm demanding was a part of daily academic life at AHSDC.

Building Deliberate Relationships

AHSDC staff members all expressed the importance of building relationships with students. Below Dr. E stated the type of individual he sought when hiring teachers:

Someone who establishes relationships with students. Somebody with high expectations, somebody who's not gonna take the BS. I need somebody who's not scared and somebody who can persevere. Somebody who is knowledgeable of at-risk populations, specifically black. I need somebody who can work with Black students too. Because if you can't work for Black students or you have any kind of fear or apprehension, this definitely isn't the place for you. –Dr. E, principal

Mr. Ray shared that it was important to note that AHSDC students had trust issues from previous schooling experiences. AHSDC teachers had to find ways to help students trust them:

A lot of the students that we work with, have some sort of issue with trust. Getting them to trust you and know that if you're hard on them, it's because you want what's best for them and not to belittle them. So in coming from a background where I felt dumb because it was not easy for me to learn, I have empathy for a lot of the students that are

here. So yes, building that relationship. You're not dumb, we're going to get this together. I'm going to make you work, so let's figure out how to get this done. –Mr. Ray, English teacher

Ms. Lana explained that her teaching philosophy included building relationships with students in order to build trust:

My teaching philosophy is that you have to learn how to develop relationships with students. Once you develop your relationships and they can trust you, you can go a lot further with students. And then once you do that, they all want to learn. You don't have to push them quite as hard. Because at the end of the day we really care about them and their education. That's what I found. I discovered that. Mr. Joe he used to be the principal here, he was the one that taught me. He sat me down one time and said Lana, what you need to do is develop relationships with the students. And once you develop relationships, you can get them to do anything you want within reason. And it's true. I found that to be true. –Ms. Lana, English Teacher

Mr. Carlos explained that an educator must deposit encouragement and love into students' lives so they could yield positive outcomes:

You can't make a withdrawal from somebody until you deposit something into them. You must put something in them before you can demand anything from them. That's called building a relationship with students. You cannot teach a kid in the classroom, if you have not built a relationship with them. If they don't think you love them, if they don't think you have a relationship with them or respect them, they're not giving anything back to you. –Mr. Carlos, social worker

Clear and Consistent Expectations

Students are referred by their traditional school, expelled, and/or persuaded to attend AHSDC in lieu of expulsion. All students applied for admission. After an application was filed, students were accepted or rejected by staff based on their school referral packet. After acceptance, students advanced on to the interview process with their parents/guardian. During the year, there was a waitlist of 25 plus students whose parents/guardians wanted them to attend.

The Interview: Setting the Stage

Interviews were held with Dr. E and Ms. Brenda. During this formal meeting, students were confronted about their past academic failure and negative behaviors, and they were required to take ownership for their bad choices and actions. Students had a reality check as they were confronted during this interview. If students did not show a desire to make changes, they were denied admission. If students agreed to make changes, they were required to sign a contract with their parents/guardians (see Appendix, K-M).

During an admission interview, I remember a potential student who almost seemed to be grinning at her horrific behavior. Ms. Brenda chimed in and forcefully told her that if she attended AHSDC, she would not be allowed to participate in drama as she had before. The student began to cry. A student crying during their admission's interview was not uncommon, and parents who entered this interview discouraged and angry would often leave with the hope of finding help for their child.

Another memorable meeting happened when a grandparent and mother attended with her child, who was failing courses and misbehaving. When the daughter learned all the rules and expectations of AHSDC, she dramatically fell out crying for over an hour. The staff members told her family she would be fine. One week after attending AHSDC, the student was all smiles and loved her new school.

Student Participants: Intense First Meetings at AHSDC

Jocelyn said her first experience at AHSDC was serious and intimidating. Dr. E candidly spoke to her about her past failure, and he told her she must take accountability for that failure:

He [Dr. E] was a little intimidating 'cause I went in there [the office] and he just had on the face like, just a serious face. And he basically told me I was like, I was a freshman. I

still had a pride thing, like I'm not a freshman, I'm not a freshman! He said okay well let's look at what you have here [your transcript]. You have no credit for all this year, you're a freshmen. And I was like oh my God, like it was something I needed to be told, but I just couldn't get it through my head. And I was like, I'm not a freshman. I started to cry. He was like you did it. He was like, you can't blame anybody else, but yourself. So you need to just accept the fact that you're a freshman, and get all the stuff that you need to get done to move on to being a sophomore. I was like, was just all tore up. He just basically threw reality in my face. And that's like what I needed. So that was good and then Ms. Brenda was like you know, we'll be here and will help you along the way. And I was like okay. –Jocelyn, 12th grader

Helena recounted that her first interview meeting with Dr. E did not go well. Dr. E told her to leave and come back when she had a better attitude. Her mother started crying after this meeting, which prompted Helena to go back to AHSDC with a better attitude:

I came here at first, I didn't get accepted. I had to come back and have another meeting. He [Dr. E] just was real mean. It instantly put me like ugh. Like I don't want to be here with him. I came with a bad attitude the first time, because I really didn't want to come here. I wanted to stay at Yellowstone High. I really got on defensive mode with Dr. E like, because he instantly started like going off. I didn't know that was his personality. But now I'm used to it. It still get on my nerves. They show that they care, they be strict on you, but it's irritating sometimes. –Helena, 11th grader

Jack remembered his interview as scary after he had heard rumors of AHSDC being a dangerous school for bad kids. However, he relaxed after staff helped him set goals:

Oh I was shaking. I was sweating, I was scared, 'cause I mean everyone gave it such a bad rep [reputation]. Everyone was like: oh that's where bad kids go. You don't want to go there. [They were like] man, there are fights every day. And so I was like, I was kind of intimidated at first. I was like oh all these high schoolers, I'm only in eighth grade. So when I was with Dr. E and Ms. Brenda, they were asking me questions kind of like what happened. How I got in trouble and all that. They asked me like what my goals were and if I had any interest in coming here. So I got to know them a little bit better at that meeting. –Jack, 10th grader

Communicating an Expectation of Success

Scholastic success has various measurements, which include test scores, grade point averages, attendance (tardiness and unexcused absences), enrollment in college-bound versus remedial classes, graduation and college enrollment rates, and behavior referrals (Hedges & Nowell, 1999; Kao, Tienda, & Schneider, 1996). Examining the alternative school literature, measurements of success include change in deviant behavior, an increase in GPAs and on standardized tests, increased graduation rates, increased self-esteem, and vocational training for post-employment opportunities (Gold & Mann, 1984). However, the alternative school literature fails to acknowledge and report accounts of students being successfully prepared for college and universities. For this study, I defined success in the words of AHSDC's principal:

To me success is: I want every student here to have a pot of gold waiting for them upon graduation. You know what a pot of gold does? If you had a pot of gold waiting for you upon graduation you would say: I need to take care of my business, and get that pot of gold. –Dr. E, principal

Supporting Positive Behavior

There are problems, absolutely but the image [at AHSDC] is changing. Not because of me, but because students are paying attention, maybe to the things that I'm saying. Speaking of success, we're seeing kids get medals, were giving them away. It's gotta be \$2000 worth of stuff [points towards the display], at least \$2000 worth of stuff. I mean, to some kids that inspires. Okay I can't get an Xbox anywhere else, let me get some good grades. –Dr. E, principal

Award Ceremonies

AHSDC held classes on trimesters instead of semesters, which gave students increased opportunities to recover their low GPAs. Award ceremonies were held twice a year, to honor students who had 2.7 GPAs or higher. The first awards ceremony was located in the school's gym and the second in the atrium.

Award Ceremony 1. A week before the awards ceremony, Dr. E called honor roll students into the media center and told them they had earned the privilege of:

1. Opting out of a rap session;
2. Bringing a clean version of iPod music of their choice to play during the lunch hour;
3. Dressing out of uniform on Fridays, with no charge.

During the ceremony Dr. E welcomed the audience, and four students told the stories of their academic transformations. Dr. E spoke warmly about each honored student and their families. Students on the honor roll also received gift certificates to a store of their choice and a medal. Ms. Brenda helped to distribute medals and certificates. These medals were the size of an oval shaped silver dollar. Pictured on the front of the medal in the center was a glowing lamp with a book in the top right hand corner and a certificate in the top left corner. At the bottom of this medal was the word “achievement.” On the back of the medal was the student’s full name, the words “AHSDC Scholar,” and the trimester and school year. I sat by Yeltsin’s mother during the ceremony. Dr. E served as the keynote speaker. Below is an excerpt from his speech:

[To Students] When you say you’re gonna do something, do it! I’m shattered for the other 60 people who are not up here [on stage]. People have died for you to have an education. I love this award’s day. I am disappointed, but I love this day. I trust that next year you will be up here. What’s out there waiting for you? When you leave AHSDC, I want you students to have a positive story to tell about your life. –Dr. E, principal

There were three levels of awards:

1. Mr. Joe Award for Academic Achievement (2.7-2.99 GPA);
2. AHSDC Award for Academic Merit (3.0-3.69 GPA);
3. Principal Award for Academic Excellence (3.7-4.0 GPA).

Yeltsin was a recipient of the Mr. Joe Award for Academic Achievement, Martin the AHSDC Award for Academic Merit, and Nina the Principal Award for Academic Excellence.

Award Ceremony 2: End of the Year. At the second awards ceremony, students with the top 21 GPAs were acknowledged and awarded the showcase gifts mentioned above by Dr. E: laptop, Xbox, electronics, and gift cards. Each teacher picked two students who were achieving academically in their class and were the most improved, and they were awarded certificates of honor in a large, expensive 8 x10 frame. Each honored student was talked about warmly by their respective teacher. There were two *Students of the Year*: Nina won the female award. Martin, Yeltsin and Nina were in the top 21 students and won the chance to pick prizes. Students also wrote letters acknowledging their favorite teachers.

Honor Roll

Students recounted memories surrounding acknowledgement for positive behavior and high grades. Nina explained what it meant to be on stage, and that she could not have accomplished this at her traditional high school:

It makes me so nervous[being on stage] because, I don't know. I just turn red and everything. Yeah buddy, finally. I'm up there, 'cause of a good GPA. See I would never be able to do that at Prescott High. –Nina, 11th grader

Jocelyn stated that making the AHSDC honor roll was one of her greatest triumphs.

Okay, my biggest triumph? When I came to AHSDC and I was getting my stuff together. And when I actually got the highest GPA I've ever got in my life, which was a 3.6. 3.6! And I was trying to get a principal's award so bad, but I was just one point off. –Jocelyn, 12th grader

Yeltsin remembered how earning good grades came with privileges, such as being able to dress out of uniform free of charge on Fridays. Students who were not on the honor roll would have to pay \$2 to dress out of uniform on Fridays. This money was put into a fund for the end of the year awards ceremony. During the last month of school, students were allowed to pay to dress out of uniform on Mondays as well as Fridays:

I don't know if you were here Monday? This white kid he came in. He had no uniform, but he didn't have no money. I guess he was trying to come in here without the money and without uniform. I walked in, Dr. E was like why don't you ask Yeltsin, he has a job. And he was like: can I borrow two dollars or something like that. Because he forgot his money or something. And I was like yeah, and I gave him the five dollars. Ms. G was like, let me know if you get your money back or not. Two days later, Ms. G was like his mom [the student] came in today and she wants to pay three Mondays for you. I was like I really don't need three Mondays, I just need one [because seniors end school early]. So next Monday, I can just come in like in regular clothes and not pay for it. –Yeltsin, 12th grader.

Positive Reinforcement

Teachers and staff were always looking for ways to reward positive behavior and work ethic. One day I was sitting in the office, and Helena came to show Ms. Brenda and Ms. Gabriella a good grade. This was extraordinary because Helena usually only came to the office after being kicked out of class. Helena stated, “Can you call my mom and tell her I’m doing better? She don’t know how I’m doing.” Ms. Brenda happily called Helena’s mom, who stated that she answered the phone apprehensively, thinking her daughter was in trouble. Ms. Brenda told Helena’s mom the positive report. Helena stood there smiling.

Ms. Tracee used extrinsic rewards, such as money, snacks, lunch off campus (McDonald’s), and candy, when students received high scores on their math quizzes and tests:

If students get a perfect score on a test, I give them a dollar, or candy or something like that. I staple like airheads or sweethearts to their test. They look forward to that. They love it. Competition is another thing. Oh my gosh, kids love when I compete against them. I play this game called Cream Me. And then if they beat me, then I'll give them the little candies called smarties. So you know they just love stuff like that. I try to, you know change it up, make it creative for them. –Ms. Tracee, math teacher

Mr. Turner held raffles for prizes where students could earn tickets for positive behavior, being on task, and earning high grades on tests and quizzes:

It just depends on the situation. I do have like little motivators. Like I give my little raffle tickets. I do nice little drawings for kids doing what they're supposed to do [out of my money]. I've been known to give them like a two dollar little voucher or whatever. Candy. They just like to get things. I like to have them come up to the board and explain certain problems. Every chance I get for them to explain what they did, I give them that platform. That makes them feel good. –Mr. Turner, math teacher

Ms. Adrienne used verbal acknowledgement and extrinsic rewards, such as snacks. She also mentioned a student who was given money during a rap session for having all As:

I do make a big deal about it. When somebody has earned an A or aced my exam, I make sure everybody knows about it. Yeah I give them kudos. At the end of the school year, we all have awards. I do have a coupon for free food. Some of the kids I buy doughnuts, cookies. I have announced now in fourth hour if everybody achieves above the C level, we've got doughnuts. Today [a student] she had all A's and we gave her money. A stranger [rap session speaker] gave her money today. That does happen here. –Ms. Adrienne, science teacher

Using Consequences to Reinforce Expectations

Students knew that while they were cared for at AHSDC, misbehaving had definite consequences. Consequences I observed included in-house suspension, where students remained in school and completed work in an empty classroom with assistance from teacher consultants; out of school suspension; parental meetings with Dr. E and Ms. Brenda; and The E-Lounge. The E-lounge was an affectionate name for mandatory after school detention. Those students failing one or more of their classes would stay after school with teachers to complete their missing assignments.

During staff meetings they discussed which students were not living up to their signed contract, and lists were generated of students who would be dismissed at the end of the school year. Helena, Jack, Raynard, and Tonya were all placed on the list for dismissal. Before the dismissals were done, the students were informed by Dr. E, to give them a chance to change their behavior. Dr. E shared the common response from students on the verge of being dismissed:

They [students] are like freaking out. I'll get it together. I know you're right. You know it's divide and conquer, they don't say that when you're in their face with their friends around. But when their friends aren't around, they fold 'cause you have to be accountable for your own actions. I like the tone [I'm setting] and I'm following up today with intensity. And it's intentional intensity. –Dr. E, principal

Raynard stated that when a student misbehaved at AHSDC, it was addressed immediately by staff members, and often on a one-on-one basis:

Because he [Dr. E], the only one that call me in the office and talk to me. Like if he know I'm messing up he'll tell me, like your shit not tight. He'll tell me. But me, not listening to him that drew our relationship farther than what it used to be. It used to be way closer. But now we done drew apart because he felt like I'm not being drawn into him. I am being drawn into a different crowd, that I'm not supposed to be with. Which is not actually true because I make the decisions for me, not for nobody else or my friends. –Raynard, 11th grader

Jack recounted how discipline was not overlooked at AHSDC, and students soon learned that their actions always prompted a reaction:

Every action here has a reaction that's equal and opposite. So if you do something bad like clearly you're going to get disciplined. Either way you're gonna get in trouble. Here everybody knows if I do this, I'm definitely gonna get in trouble there's no way out of it. So people just don't do it –Jack, 10th grader

Martin explained that when a student misbehaved, staff immediately addressed the issue:

Oh they [staff] gonna get in you and you straighten up. You wouldn't talk to your mom like that and they know it. They know that you wouldn't be able to do that at home and it's no different here. 'Cause a teacher out there, a black teacher they know I wouldn't do that, and they hold me to it. –Martin, 12th grader

Viewing Misbehavior as a Puzzle

Mr. Turner stated that when students misbehaved or were disengaged, he would work to find out why they lacked motivation:

I try in my own subtle way, try to figure out why you're not motivated. Because you can be not motivated for different reasons. So you know if it's "A" I'll do this. If it's "B" I'll do that. But I'm going to gauge, I'm going to find out what it is. Have you been

unsuccessful in math? Is that why you're negative towards it? Are you negative toward school in general and don't see the big picture of why this affects your future? Is it more me, I don't know? So I have to find that out. –Mr. Turner, math teacher

Nina discussed how educators at AHSDC took time to talk to them about their problems and behavior instead of simply calling their parents to reprimand them:

She [Ms. Karla] can help me through stuff. Like some of teachers, [traditional schools] like if you say I have a problem or whatever they will call your mom right here, right now. But Ms. Karla is like, no we have time, calm down and let's talk. –Nina, 11th grader

Providing Learning Supports (Small Class Size, Teacher Consultants, Collaboration)

AHSDC was known as a school with numerous benefits aiding students. Some of these benefits included small population and class size, two teacher consultants, teacher collaboration, two liaisons, and a social worker. The latter roles have been discussed previously.

Small Class Size

AHSDC had 100 students and each class had no more than 15 students. There were some classrooms with as few as four students dependent on the subject. Traditional schools used a student-teacher ratio of 25:1, but AHSDC's ratio was 7:1. Jack stated this smaller school enabled Dr. E to make daily rounds to observe classes and interact with students:

It's [AHSDC] more disciplined, cause like Tonya said it's a smaller school. So it's a lot easier for Dr. E to just come around and check on everybody. And make sure everybody's doing what you need to do. I mean he'll come in like class not even expecting to catch anybody sleeping. He'll catch someone sleeping, make them stand up and talk to them. They'll get in trouble for it. When I first went into classes, like it was so small I was just like what am I doing here? The teacher's actually going to pay attention to me now. So I gotta pay attention, otherwise I'm going to look stupid and they gonna put me on blast. –Jack, 10th grader

Ms. Tracee stated that the small class size eased anxiety of students who felt bad about their learning challenges.

The small classroom setting helps. I think it helps them [students] to not be as nervous. Not be as upset or you know act out as much. Because they realize they're not the only one that's struggling. There's others and it's gonna be okay. They can do the work and we're here to help them. It's kind of a good thing when you feel like you can help some of the ones you know that you're going to lose at a large high school. –Ms. Tracee, math teacher

Teacher Consultants and Specialty Staff

In AHSDC there were specialty staff members, including two teacher consultants (Ms. Paula and Ms. Katie), one community liaison (Ms. Brenda), one counselor liaison (Ms. Karla), and a part-time social worker (Mr. Carlos). These individuals were not teachers, yet they held vital roles in students' educational process. Mr. Turner explained how he interacted with the two teacher consultants:

I like the teacher's consultant, the way that's set up. Where you have them come in to help support the students while they're in the class. They basically, come into a teacher's classroom to help assist. They focus on their student that's a part of their caseload. It's a more focused approach on the kid. They know everything about the kid. They know all about their challenges and they set goals for the kids. They work with us. –Mr. Turner, math teacher

Mr. Carlos shared how he worked with staff and students on his caseload. He was only at AHSDC twice a week:

Typical day is, I come in, check with my teacher consultants, the administration, Ms. B or Ms. G to find out what has transpired since I've been gone. I'm here two days a week. So I just kind of check-in, check the climate, see how things are going, what's going on, who I need to talk to, any pressing issues. From there I look at what I already had scheduled, what kids I need to see, what paperwork needs to be completed and I just flow from there. –Mr. Carlos, social worker

Collaboration

Community Enrichment Activities and Staff Meetings. Every Friday after lunch, students participated in enrichment activities with community members. Facilitators included

retired and current professionals, who volunteered to lead enrichment classes. These classes included chess, theater, sewing, sports, Black media critical analysis, dance, leadership training, art, and cooking. Simultaneously, staff members met with Dr. E for updates and planning. If there was a problem with students, it was shared with other staff members. Topics at staff meetings also included future field trips, standardized testing protocols, technology training, and new school clubs (e.g. ecology club and bike club, both started by Mr. Clark).

Academic Subject Partnership. There were two teachers per academic subject, and they had their planning periods at the same time to aid collaboration. Ms. Tracee and Mr. Turner, math teachers, explained that they worked together to plan class sessions, share ideas, and strategize on what worked best for student instruction. Mr. Ray, an English teacher, stated that he worked with the history teacher, Mr. Clark, and the government teacher, Mr. Frank, to plan similar lessons, to triangulate and reinforce learning:

I tend to try to collaborate and think of different ways to embrace the student academically. So they're getting maybe the same information in more than one way. I tend to work with Mr. Clark and Mr. Frank. They seem to have the same general leanings that I do towards. Wrapping education around kids, just trying different things to get them [students] going. What hasn't worked, and just trying new things. A scattershot approach. What will stick? –Mr. Ray, English teacher

Ms. Adrienne sat on curriculum boards with area traditional high school teachers, and she sought grants to ensure that her students received equitable science resources:

I guess I brought curriculum back to AHSDC. Here at AHSDC curriculum wasn't being taught as it could be. They [teachers] weren't participating in any of the staff meetings at the other buildings. I had no supplies, so I started going to all these [district curriculum] meetings. And then I think a few years ago, one of the teachers [from traditional school] just came through [AHSDC] and thought it was unfair that we weren't getting any curriculum funding for our program. –Ms. Adrienne, science teacher

Insisting Beyond Believing

Dr. E shared that apathy and work ethic were the two main problems of students in AHSDC. He not only communicated high expectations, but also forced student achievement. Grades ranged for students; for a complete list of student participants' grades, see Appendix, N:

Well, pretty much in this environment kids act like they don't know. They dumb stuff down. They don't want to give you answers. I force stuff out of kids, I'm going to force. I'm going to get your best out of you. I'm not going to accept that [I don't know] as an answer. And a number of them suffer from a lack of confidence. But if you believe in them, that makes a difference. I say yes you do, you've been doing this for seven years. You know the answer, you can tell me. I'll help you too along, but you do know. So you have to build them up. But a lot of them are used to nobody [teachers] demanding from them on a daily basis. And are comfortable with: okay you don't want to answer? Let's move on. Not me. I'm gonna push you and I'm going to build you up. –Dr. E, principal

Mr. Turner explained that his role as a math teacher was to keep students motivated.

Jocelyn asked Mr. Turner to be her math coach, to ensure she did well in his class:

So I have to coach them [students], be on their back. I have to facilitate. That's my main goal you know, to facilitate, push the kid, question them, drive their thinking. And, just keep them motivated. Keep them on their toes. I mean I would like to think that my class isn't boring. I don't know what the students quite say about it being boring or not. All I know is they say that they like me, but they don't like math, regardless of what I do (laughs). –Mr. Turner, math teacher

Ms. Brenda stated that when working with AHSDC students, repetition and consistency were important to ensure that students were achieving:

The challenges here are work ethic and apathy. You know that's always the challenge. But like I said, all you gotta do is, you just keep saying the same thing over and over again hoping that one of those times it'll click, you know? But my big goal is every year if I can just get one [student]. Anything over one is like icing on top of the cake, right? But, if I can just get one, cause each one, teach one. You know? Even Helena's coming around. I try to let her know [her progress]. I do feel like I do a good job at my job. But I can say the reason why is, because I genuinely love every last one of them like my own child. –Ms. Brenda, community liaison

Mr. Shaw also said that repetition was necessary when working with AHSDC students:

AHSDC has a lot of repetition. As a teacher, teaching three sections of the same class. There's also the same sort of thing: Where's your material? Where's your this? Where's your that? You know, you ought to do this. We get on kids about their academic preparedness and their behavior. It's like repetitious. I don't think that generally speaking, I do not always see the rewards until much later. I've had kids come back years later and say thank you. –Mr. Shaw, Science teacher

Tonya explained that AHSDC staff members openly insisted that students pursue college:

Yeah they really is strong on college. At a bigger school with so many kids, whether you go or not, they don't care if you pass they class. Like you know it's a topic here [AHSDC], like you know college is a very important factor coming here. Just being a freshman like college, college, college, college, college, college, like everybody [teachers] here graduated from college with their masters or higher. –Tonya, 11th grader

THEME 5:

ADDRESSING NON-ACADEMIC NEEDS

Most days are pretty decent. But you know I'm one of these teachers, if something is going on in the air and atmosphere, if something happens in the cafeteria, we do what we need to do to get that cleared out before we try to learn. Because I'm telling you it's so difficult to teach students anything, until you clear the air. –Ms. Lana, English Teacher

In the quote above, Ms. Lana explained how outside issues affecting AHSDC students seeped into the classroom. If these issues were not handled properly, the learning process was impeded.

The Non-Academic Needs of Students

Noguera (2003) discussed the importance of responding to the non-academic needs of students and holistically discussing academics in school reform. Noguera argued that in urban and high-poverty areas, high stakes testing and accountability do not truly address the achievement gap. Social, cultural, and economic issues, as well as physical health and well-being, are important factors. For example, chronic respiratory conditions, mental health issues, lack of resources, unstable housing, and neighborhood violence and drugs must be acknowledged. Problems such as parental unemployment, hunger, stress, and inadequate clothing also can impact the student's school experiences negatively.

AHSDC staff said that nurturing students' non-academic concerns and issues was not only expected, but the norm. These concerns were handled both during and outside of school time. During participant observations, I saw how AHSDC dealt with students' cultural, psychological, familial, emotional, and social concerns.

Cultural

An example of a cultural concern pertained to a young Indian student who, for cultural reasons, did not wear deodorant. Although this seemed harmless, during warmer months, in a school with no air-conditioning, she would emit a stronger body odor. This concern led her to being in constant quarrels, and on a few occasions close to having fistfights with other young ladies, who tried to confront her about her hygiene. Dr. E and Ms. Brenda talked to her and her father about this sensitive concern, as well as the other female students. This information was well-received by all involved.

Psychological

On another occasion, a young lady pulled a knife out at home and threatened to kill her mother. This was an interesting incident because instead of the father calling the police or mental health professionals, he first came to talk to Dr. E and Ms. Brenda, seeking intervention. The two staff members helped the father seek services for his daughter.

There was also a male student who had attempted suicide prior to coming to Alternative High. Dealing with depression, he said that he could not go to his parents for help, and instead he reached out to AHSDC staff members. During the study, he began to slip into depression, and he sought the aid of staff members.

At the beginning of this study, Helena missed a month of school after going into hiding, having had her life threatened by an enemy of her boyfriend. I remember the conversation that Dr. E and Ms. Brenda had with Helena. Dr. E told her that he feared for her life, because of her associations. He said he was saddened that she, someone he saw as a daughter, was in physical danger. Ms. Brenda candidly shared with Helena that she should cherish her life and well-being,

and that she had too much potential to waste on street living. Helena remained quiet, but later she shared that she appreciated the honesty and care from this conversation.

Familial

Before interviewing Ms. Brenda, I noticed an upset grandmother and a male AHSDC student sitting outside waiting to meet with Dr. E. I learned that this young man had stolen money from his mother's purse to pay his marijuana debt. The grandmother sought the help of Dr. E and Ms. Brenda, instead of seeking legal recourse. Ironically, Ms. Brenda was related to this young man, and she referred to his grandmother as "auntie."

During this exchange, they talked extensively to this young man about the seriousness of his actions, to the point that he started crying. Dr. E instructed this young man to get on the office telephone and call all his so-called friends, to tell them that he owed his mother money and needed to pay it immediately. The young man was told to use the speakerphone feature. As this student called each friend, he was told, "Sorry man, I can't help you." Dr. E explained that true friends would go out of their way to help another friend in need, and his peers were not really his friends.

During an AHSDC admissions interview, I observed how this school helped parents. One student's mother shared that she had attended AHSDC over 15 years ago, yet had not graduated. Dr. E brought in Ms. Karla, counselor liaison, to pull this mother's transcripts and to discuss the courses necessary for her to receive her high school diploma. Dr. E told this mother that she was so close to finishing that he wanted to encourage her to finish high school before her son.

Jocelyn, at one time during this study, was homeless, and Ms. Karla assisted by finding her a place to live. Jack recalled how Mr. Klein and Ms. Brenda did the same for his family when they were homeless.

Emotional Stress

Finishing school while working full time to help his family created stress for Yeltsin. At times I would see Yeltsin sitting in the hallway, looking distressed after removing himself from class. When I asked him what was wrong, he said he did not understand the material and became angry, so he left class. He and staff mentioned that he had an anger problem, and once he hit a brick wall with his fist. I remember one afternoon, in Dr. E's office, when Yeltsin was extremely stressed; he said that he was scared he was not going to graduate. I remember Dr. E. saying, "Look at me when I'm talking to you. I'm not going to let you fail." Yeltsin, feeling overwhelmed, left the office and went out and stood by his car. While he stood in the parking lot gazing into space, I went out to talk to him. He explained that he was scared he was going to fail, and that he never wanted to disrespect Dr. E. He also stated if he could not graduate, he was moving to Mexico. After we talked, he went into Dr. E's office, apologized, and talked to him about how he was feeling.

A female student during this study confided in Ms. Lana that a male family member was sexually abusive towards her. AHSDC staff worked with this student for counseling resources, and they attended court sessions to assist the young lady being removed from the home.

Social

The topic of peer association was a common one that staff discussed with students at AHSDC. Staff advised students that they had to be careful who they hung around with, because peer associations were extremely important to their educational outcomes. Dr. E stated the following at the end of the year Award's Ceremony:

When you're going through school, you have to figure out who's your friend. That's huge. You have to figure out who's for you and who's not. As I said in the graduation speech last week, I told the whole class: some friends are worth bringing along with you the next

four years. If not, they are not worth bringing you down the next four years of your life. So get rid of them. You must get rid of them because they're not good for you. You have to start all over and start fresh. –Dr. E, Principal

Leadership: Opportunities to Shine

Dr. E shared that many students attending AHSDC came in with low self-esteem and low self-efficacy. Part of the staff's job was to nurture, build up, and offer students leadership opportunities. Those students were initially resistant to these high expectations. However, they soon appreciated and looked forward to these opportunities given to them. Below is a chart of how AHSDC allowed student participants to step out of their comfort zones to be leaders:

Table 4. Students' Leadership Opportunities

Student Participant	Leadership Opportunity
Yeltsin	Spoke at a rap session about his college visit.
Helena	Was a speaker at an Arcadia School District board meeting.
Raynard	Facilitated the Freedom Riders rap session.
Nina	Served as a translator for parents who only spoke Spanish.
Jocelyn	Wrote and presented a speech on gender bias and abuse to students, staff and parents.
Jack	A speaker at that Arcadia School District board meeting.
Martin	Traveled with Dr. E, giving public speeches regarding his life and achievement.
Tonya	Candidate for student leadership conference and senior guide for potential parents.

Different Perspectives

Too Much in Our Lives

Raynard believed that AHSDC was too connected to students and felt it was annoying:

But at the same time they [staff] want to be too much into our personal life more than our school [life]. Like what we do out of school we represent AHSDC, but at least were not doing it in AHSDC T-shirt or anything like that. –Raynard, 11th grader

Helena said that it was irritating how involved AHSDC was in their personal lives, but overall it was a good thing:

They [staff] show that they care. They be strict on you, but it's irritating sometimes. They do teach well and stay in your face more than a regular school. Sometimes it get annoying, but yeah it's a good thing education wise. –Helena, 10th grader

The Whole Student

It is [holistic], and people who don't believe that are sometimes, they're running as a deficit as an educator. You have to think about that entire child. The more you get to know that entire child the better you can work with them. That's how their trust is built. And a lot of kids say they don't trust some white teachers, because the white teachers don't make an effort to get to know them. And just you know, just show concern, and caring. –Ms. Lana, English Teacher

Above, Ms. Lana discussed how teachers in traditional schools did not always nurture the whole student. Below, Mr. Carlos also mentioned how important it was to be a child-focused educator:

Being children focused, keeping kids first, keeping their needs first. Making sure they get help, doing whatever you can to meet their needs. At the same time challenging them. Also looking at their anticipated needs, because you know what they're going to need in the future; even though they don't [know their needs]. So trying to have a balance in helping the whole student. –Mr. Carlos, social worker

In Foster (1997), it was stated that the teacher has to be concerned with much more than academics. "As a black teacher teaching black children I am just as interested in the kind of people that my students become, as with what they are learning" (p. 143). As a participant

observer, I noticed that staff members also promoted student development that helped students reflect on reality, connect to their history, prepare for the real world, and dialogue and acknowledge their "daddy issue."

Keeping It Real

For me, it's not only help with college, it's the real world as a whole. Because here they won't sugarcoat anything they tell you. Especially Ms. Brenda, like every time I have problems outside of school, I always go to her because she's been a family friend for a really, long time. She knows like my background. She's lived here for so long, she knows how it is. She's just gonna tell you straight up how things are going to go, and she's going to tell you if you don't like it, then hit the road. –Jack, 10th grade

Above, Jack explained how AHSDC educators did not sugarcoat information but instead kept it real. Students not only appreciated this, they also felt benefited from this honesty. Jocelyn spoke candidly about Dr. E, who she felt was "real" with all students. She felt this was an essential part of the real world educational process:

Yeah, yeah he [Dr. E] does, he's very like what's the word? Very professional but he's also down-to-earth because he'll get raw (laughs). I remember he, with me, Maya, Donna and Cathy talked about guys and how we should never lower our standards. All that stuff, so we know how much we're worth. Cause a lot of girls don't know how much they're worth. So he does good with that, and he's just a father figure. A good one. –Jocelyn, 12th grader

Helena mentioned that coming to AHSDC was a reality check for her:

A reality check. I still do what I do. I still do what I want to do. I'm my own reality check. I check myself about stuff. If I know somebody gonna keep telling me something over and over, I be like I gotta work on it. I tell myself that. I'm going to check myself. So I mean, they keep it real with you [at AHSDC], like you keep doing this you're going to end up here [place you do not want to be]. –Helena, 10th grader

Mrs. Brenda explained that some parents were initially taken aback by her approach. However, after they got to know her, they understood that her honesty was out of love for students:

Initially, with parents usually new students who come in, initially they are taken aback by my approach. Because I am not going to sugarcoat it. I don't have time for that. I'm not going to kumbayah, everything is perfect, you know? I'm giving it to you raw dog, and a lot of times students have been lying to their parents about their grades and social life. So reality sets in for the parents and their kids. –Ms. Brenda, community liaison

One afternoon, Tonya scheduled a meeting with her mother, Dr. E, and Ms. Brenda. Tonya said that she was tired of being at AHSDC, and she felt she should return to her traditional school. Tonya, who was usually thoughtful and had a positive attitude, was not herself. It was interesting to watch Dr. E and Ms. Brenda carefully, yet honestly, tell her that she was not ready to leave AHSDC. Dr. E reminded her that her attendance record at AHSDC was not up to par, and that going back to a traditional school would not ensure her success. He made the following deal with her; if in the next trimester she attended school with no more than three absences, he would allow her to leave at the conclusion of that trimester. Tonya agreed. If students left AHSDC without Dr. E's approval, they lost the right to ever return. I asked Tonya a few months later about that conversation:

I think I just wanted to leave because like it was senior year and I didn't want to be at AHSDC. You know? You know how that go. I didn't want to be here anymore. I think it was more of a friend thing, social things. Like, that is not a good look for senior year. Then he [Dr. E] was like if you don't miss more than three days of school, you can leave after first trimester. But come on now. Three days? Dr. E knowing how I am, that was just a rap. I'm gonna just tough it out until May, just to get out. 'Cause if I go to Hamilton [High] I have to get a full schedule. –Tonya, 11th grader

Connection to History

Dr. E stated that lack of self-esteem in students of color was an issue at AHSDC. He expressed that schools and media, not families, were educating Black students on what it means to be a racial minority and this was problematic. Because students had not been properly educated about the history of their school's predominant race, Dr. E utilized bi-weekly rap sessions to discuss historical and present race-related issues:

Often there's no teaching your children what it means to be an African-American. Don't let the TV teach them because it's too late. And they start thinking that we're thugs and thieves and pimps and pushers. It's too late, it's too late! We have an argument out there [AHSDC] over basketball. I'm like, we can't argue over grades? Who's got the tightest grades? Black kids want to give their best performance in the basketball arena, but in the classroom they want to be a nonfactor. If you knew the history of your people you wouldn't dare, you wouldn't DARE, do that. And also Black kids disconnect from civil rights. Disconnected from slavery and all the contributions and all the sacrifices. They are totally disconnected from that. So they also say like they're not hurting anybody, what difference does it make? When our ancestors sacrificed for us to have certain, such opportunities? So that's our biggest problem self-esteem or the esteem of black kids upon entering school. –Dr. E, principal

Mr. Klein believed students were labeled in the elementary grades, and these labels followed them:

I don't say it's here [AHSDC]. I say it's in general [traditional schools]. Some African American students have already had that identity crisis when they were in elementary school. Once you're identified/labeled, it stays with you. –Mr. Klein, PE/Health teacher

Ms. Tracee stated that the students in this district, especially Black students, had a hard time correlating being Black and achieving. She said that students often associated being Black with being able to play sports or rap, instead of being academically talented:

I think some of them [students] have a problem. They're trying to find a place to fit, like Black kids, Black males especially. If you're Black, you're supposed to be able to dance, you're supposed to be able to play basketball, you're supposed to be hard or this type of

way. They're supposed to act Black, so what they do is, they emulate what they see on TV and they overdo it. –Ms. Tracee, math teacher

Preparing for the Real World

When asked why race was discussed extensively at AHSDC, Dr. E responded that real-world applications were necessary to ensure that students understood why school was relevant to their lives:

I've done it with every population. But I do it with this population in particular, because they're very fragile. They've had poor experiences in high school and middle schools. And a lot of times they're always in trouble and they can't see how school relates to the real world. So like I said, theory means one thing, but we put it into practice so students can see it and understand why: oh that's why, I get it now. So I'm looking for every opportunity I can, to make sure the students get an opportunity to see how things relate. A significant portion of them have bad attitudes. So you have to let them know how their attitude will impact their future success. –Dr. E, principal

Martin shared that AHSDC was unique because learning happened outside of the classroom. He believed that teachers taught both academic and real-world subjects:

They [AHSDC] teach you way of life. 'Cause like even though the teachers here build relationships with students, they often teach you about life. And like what the real world is like. That's what they set you up for, reality. We operate in reality here. –Martin, 12th grader

Jocelyn stated that her traditional school allowed her freedom to do whatever she wanted. Because society actually has rules, boundaries and guidelines, she felt AHSDC was adequately preparing her to be a responsible adult:

Okay so at Hamilton High, I could do whatever I wanted. Real world you can't do whatever you want. I can't show up late for work and not get reprimanded. The benefits [of attending AHSDC] were, I could get like back into the groove of things. 'Cause it's just like a schedule. Soon, I'll have freedom and I just have to get myself together and know how to manage my time for college. I go to Hamilton, but I'm still going to come here [AHSDC] 'cause I know I'd be everywhere. And I still need help (laughs). –Jocelyn, 12th grader

During a participant observation, I saw a worksheet that had math problems

based on an upcoming Super Bowl game (see Appendix O). The creator of this assignment, Mr. Turner, shared,

First of all this worksheet that I made up, it has to do with a math concept that a lot of students get stumped on called systems of equations. And so one thing that I'm always trying to do, is I'm trying to take the sting out of, I guess out of learning, you know? I mean you have to make sure that when you teach you tie in relevance and show them how it relates to the real world. Then they should be more likely to pay attention and try to figure it out. I made it [the worksheet], like right before the Super Bowl. So I started using NFL teams to try to show them how systems of equations can tie into word problems, in real world situations. I don't believe in just teaching a whole bunch of skills, without saying when you're actually going to use these skills. –Mr. Turner, math teacher

Rap Sessions

Rap sessions were held bi-monthly on Wednesday mornings in the school's atrium. Rap sessions were mandatory for both students and staff. Open and honest discussions about student achievement, and school and societal concerns were facilitated here. One session, staff members discussed the differences between high school and college (see Appendix P). Guest speakers also came to discuss their life stories, struggles, and triumphs:

The rap sessions are powerful. We're bringing in speakers, people to motivate students, to help them to see the importance of an education and learning. And just also learning from other people's stories. We also brought in people who found themselves in jail and who basically helped them [students] to see, why they don't want to go down that road [jail/prison]. –Ms. Tracee, math teacher

Table 5 presents rap session topics, followed by a brief discussion of memorable sessions.

Table 5. Rap Session Topics

Guest Speaker/Facilitator	Topic/Activity	Memorable Moments
Dr. E, Martin, and newspaper writer	Martin's biographical video	Martin's story makes the news.
Dr. E's father	Racism and World War II	Discussion about relationship with fathers, race and history.
Dr. E and student	Public reading of "Way's of White Folks," written by Langston Hughes	
Mr. Randolph and Raynard	Former Freedom Rider: What are you willing to do for your freedom?	Jocelyn cried at the conclusion of session as she thanked Mr. Randolph.
Dr. E	Post Red Tail's movie discussion	
Mr. Detrick	From prison to businessman	Mr. Detrick wept when he explained the horrors of prison.
Dr. E and Student Panel and luncheon	Tuskegee Airmen HBO film	National Parents' Day
Teen Center/ Ms. Clarrissa -young ladies	Hardships and overcoming: former prostitute and drug user now a social worker in training	Helena apologized to women/young ladies for her behavior.
Ms. Oliver	Former civil rights activist	
Mr. Carlos/Mr. Allen/District Attorney	Black professional males overcoming hardships	
Dr. E and banker	Employment/Saving money/accounts	
Peer to Peer student presentation/Ms. Karla	Depression and mental illness	
Mr. Frank and Mayor of City	How a city is run/civics	
Emergency meeting	Bullying will not be tolerated	Emotions flared as difference in beliefs were explored.
Dr. E	Bullying film and discussion	
Dr. E and Ms. Brenda	Awards ceremony	

Table 5 (cont'd)

Dr. E and Ms. Brenda	Grades, financial aid and testing	
Dr. E	Board meeting preparation	Introduction of proposal Practice of speeches Mr. Joe's visit.
Dr. E	Read a book of choice	Discussion of books
Dr. E	The election and need to vote	
Dr. E	Traveling aboard	
Dr. E	Viewing of presidential election events	

Martin's National Story

The first rap session I attended at AHSDC began with Ms. Brenda and Dr. E discussing financial aid, college applications, and ACT preparation. Following this discussion, a journalist from a national newspaper introduced the video he developed about Martin's life. As AHSDC's students watched the video, Martin talked about his life. This included dealing with the murder of his father, the incarceration of his mother, and his tribulations as a Black male student. He gave credit to Dr. E for pulling him aside and insisting better of him.

Dr. E's Father: WWII and Racism

It was common to see family members of staff at AHSDC. One memorable rap session consisted of Dr. E's father, a former dentist who became a Reverend, discussing his experiences with racism during World War II. At 70 years old, he had a lot of wisdom and historical knowledge to share, as students asked him questions about living in the south during the Civil Rights Movement.

Mr. Dietrich: From Prison to Businessman

Mr. Dietrich spoke with students about how his poor choices greatly affected his early life. As an AHSDC student 20 years ago, he explained that he did not take school seriously, was a bully, and eventually was sent to prison for drug possession. As he stood before the students, this 300-pound man wept. He expressed that prison was not a place they would ever want to go, and how their choices now impacted where they would end up years from now. After turning his life around after his time in prison, Mr. Dietrich owns a successful transportation business.

Emergency Meeting: Bullying

One Friday while I was conducting participant observations, a group of students gathered outside the office and said they needed to meet with Dr. E immediately. Thirty minutes later, Dr. E got on the public address system to inform staff and students that there was an emergency rap session meeting. As we gathered in the atrium, we all stood curious, waiting for Dr. E to explain the emergency. As I stood among students and staff, everyone was whispering: "Do you know what is going on?" Dr. E soon explained that there had been a serious bullying incident against an openly gay male student.

This was an emotional rap session, because opinions clashed around morality, respect, and freedom. Dr. E stated that AHSDC was a no bullying school, with zero tolerance. He stated he would protect each and every student as his own child. He said that the main issue was not agreement with a person's beliefs, but respect among students regardless of one's beliefs. Unbeknownst to others, this student had tried to commit suicide before coming to AHSDC. At the next rap session, Dr. E showed a film on bullying for debriefing. The film was written by a gay male who had experienced bullying and received no protection from his school. As an adult, the director worked as a social activist against bullying.

Teen Zone Speaker

Two employees of a youth crisis organization came to speak at a rap session. After these speakers had given out their information and resources, they split attendees into groups by gender. I attended the females' session, in which one of the workers at this organization explained her life's journey. This young lady recounted abuse at home. She dropped out of school, was in abusive romantic relationships, and worked as a prostitute for a short period of time before reaching out for help and turning her life around. She was in college studying to be a social worker, and she shared her story because she knew she was not alone in her experiences. During this rap session, Helena, on her own volition, made a public apology in case she had done anything to hurt or disrespect anyone. Helena explained that she was going through abuse at home and was angry. Helena connected with this organization. In an individual interview, Helena stated she could relate with this young lady because they had similar stories.

Student Reactions to Rap Sessions

Nina stated that the rap session on bullying was an enlightening experience for her, because Dr. E helped open her mind to other perspectives:

I love rap session because, like you know with the Ronald thing him being gay or whatever, I had another picture of him. But I didn't notice that he was truly hurt and it wasn't even his fault, because he trust people [with his secret] that he shouldn't trust in the first place. But yeah, it makes me realize that other people have different views. Because you never know what can happen in your family, so don't be assuming. And that makes me open my mind. I realized that. –Nina, 11th grader

Tonya expressed that she liked the rap sessions with speakers, yet was tired of the sessions where staff members discussed failing grades:

Some rap sessions, like they spoke to me. I cried when people talk about past struggles. Those are good, yeah like guest speakers. But I don't know. I couldn't do the grade thing

like over and over again, you know? If your grades aren't good I mean come on now [get it together]. I like rap sessions. I like [sitting in] the front, you get to see everything. I like the front. –Tonya, 11th grader

Jocelyn believed that because she was older, she fully appreciated the rap sessions. She sat in the front row so she would not be distracted:

I used to sit in the back. That was back then when I first got here [AHSDC]. As time goes on, like you see how rap session like is. It will like change how you perceive like your subjects and stuff like that. I feel like I need to be in the front. I don't want to have the cheap seats. I can't hear what they're saying. And like if you have speakers, I want to like to be the first. I just want to be there to get all that I can get. –Jocelyn, 12th grader

Raynard recounted the rap session where Mr. Randolph, a Freedom Rider, spoke. At this rap session, Jocelyn began crying because she said she was so grateful to meet a man who risked his life for her future:

[His impression of rap session he facilitated]. Good because I actually seen a student cry. I never seen a student ever cry at the rap session unless they got talked about. But other than that she [Jocelyn] cried. I don't even know, she just cried and told me that she was happy that I brought him [Mr. Randolph, freedom rider]. And I don't know if it touched her in a certain spot or what? But I was happy that I did good 'cause, I still get appreciation. Got appreciation yesterday still. I was happy. I thought I did good. –Raynard, 11th grader

Moving Beyond the Daddy Issue

Dr. E and staff members mentioned on several occasions that a huge problem for AHSDC students was their "daddy issue." Dr. E would tell students that he knew they had this issue, but this was no reason for them to figuratively beat up on their mothers, who were present and active in their lives.

Dr. E explained that the lack of a father figure's presence in students' lives affected their esteem. Interestingly enough, every student that I interviewed, and even students who gave speeches at the board meetings, expressed that Dr. E was a father figure to them. I was careful as

I gathered familial information. I simply posed the question for them to tell me about their lives, from kindergarten to the present day. I listened and recorded their family information.

Biological Fathers of AHSDC

None of the student participants lived with their biological father for various reasons. Some of the reasons were as follows: their father lived in a different household/city (Raynard, Tonya, Jocelyn, Helena), in a different state (Jack), or in a different country (Yeltsin and Nina); or their father was deceased (Martin). The student participants who mentioned a biological paternal void included Jocelyn, Martin and Nina (who had a stepfather in her household). Nina mentioned the anger she felt that her biological father was not in her life. Helena mentioned a strained relationship due to emotional abuse. Raynard and Yeltsin mentioned nothing specific about their fathers, except their locations. Jack said absolutely nothing about his father. Tonya and Jocelyn were the only individuals who mentioned fond memories of their fathers.

AHSDC's Father Figures

Dr. E, as well as other male staff members, served as father figures to students. Mr. Klein, after being honored as a great teacher, stated the following at the end of the year ceremony:

I know a lot of males don't have father figures and I treat my males [students] no differently than I'm treating my sons. So when you see my son come in, I treat him no differently than I treat you guys. When I get on him, partly because that's the way I was raised, I get on all you guys. But if I don't get on you or anybody else doesn't get on you, then that means we don't care, and we do care. –Mr. Klein, PE/Health teacher

Ms. Lana told her students to cut their mothers, who are doing the best they can, some slack. She also believed girls were not being validated by their fathers:

I said you guys, I know it's difficult and you should really give your mother some slack. Because it's hard for women, it's difficult to raise boy children, when you are female. And then there's no male around to help you, or support? That's difficult. Y'all think you're grown already, and she's not getting any assistance from you all's dads, because some of these dads don't come around. So the boys you know, they don't have that role model and they're scared to trust somebody. Also, I think that girls want to get attention from a boy, because they don't have their dad in the home to validate that they really are somebody special. Dr. E says this to them [students] all the time, you've got us. –Ms. Lana, English Teacher

During Focus Group 2, students listed words and phrases to describe AHSDC. All students expressed family and love as words (Appendix, Q).

CHAPTER 6

CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATIONS

Introduction

The lived experiences of students and staff at AHSDC, a school known for diminishing the academic achievement gap, were the focus of this study. As indicated by student experiences, prior to attending AHSDC their experiences consisted overwhelmingly of low expectations, poor relationships with teachers, and being targets of racism, sexism, and classism. Consequences included failing grades, truancy, and misbehavior. However, their behavior, grades and educational outcomes improved when these students' school environment changed. The phenomenon of this study was AHSDC, a school where previously unsuccessful students were able to turn their lives around, graduate from high school, and attend college.

The significance of this study has the following premises: the first is that African-American, Latino, and low-income students are at risk of academic failure in school, thus contributing to the academic achievement gap (Howard, 2010). Second, these students are not doomed, and with correct interventions cannot only be successful in school, but are also able to pursue higher education. Third, blame cannot be placed solely on students; the institutions/schools must also be examined.

From student and staff interviews and focus groups, there were five themes that emerged from the interviews with students and various school personnel that were consistently discussed as part of the lived experiences at AHSDC. These five themes were: Strong, Culturally Relevant, Authentic Leadership (Brown & Beckett, 2007; Khalifa, 2008; Lomotey, 1989; Paige & Witty, 2010); Effective Schooling (Edmonds, 1979; Lezotte, 1991); Cultural Relevancy (Ladson-

Billings, 2009); Warm Demanders (Bondy & Ross, 2008; Kleinfeld, 1972; Ross et al., 2008); and Addressing Non-Academic Needs (Foster, 1997; Noguera, 2003).

This study suggests that these five themes are necessary for implementation at alternative schools that primarily serve students of color so that they will persist, graduate, and pursue higher education.

Summary of Major Findings

The first theme found in AHSDC was an atmosphere of structure, discipline, stability, and high expectations: Effective Schooling (Edmonds, 1979; Lezotte, 1991). The next was a strong Black leader who was willing to take on a fatherly role within the school: Strong, Culturally Relevant, Authentic Leadership (Brown & Beckett, 2007; Khalifa, 2008; Lomotey, 1989; Paige & Witty, 2010). Within this atmosphere were also culturally relevant interactions among staff and students: Cultural Relevancy (Ladson-Billings, 2009). Next were staff members who built warm relationships, yet insisted on achievement and good behavior: Warm Demanders (Bondy & Ross, 2008; Kleinfeld, 1972; Ross et al., 2008). Lastly, staff members educated the whole student and addressed Non-Academic Needs (Foster, 1997; Noguera, 2003).

Beyond Effective Schooling Theory

Students' and staff members' lived experiences extended beyond the correlates of effective schooling. I found that even though these themes were different, they were very much intertwined. At their core, all the themes were focused on student achievement, yet to choose only one or two themes would unquestionably limit the stories and lived experiences in this alternative school. What was found in this alternative school was that Effective Schooling Theory was not sufficient alone to support students toward achievement. There was an integral

piece missing. Cultural Relevancy was the necessary and missing component from this theoretical framework of Effective Schooling.

Theme 1: Strong, Culturally Relevant, Authentic Leadership

Staff and students alike mentioned that Dr. E was a father figure and disciplinarian who set the tone for order, structure, and achievement at AHSDC (Brown & Beckett, 2007; Khalifa, 2008; Lomotey, 1989; Paige & Witty, 2010). Dr. E was not just an individual who disciplined; he also built relationships with staff, students, and parent/guardians. He knew each student, met with them at least once a semester to set goals, and had an open door policy. Honesty was key in his relationship with students. He wanted to prepare students effectively to navigate society.

For example, Helena who found herself in trouble regularly indicated that Dr. E was a strict but a good principal, because he genuinely cared for students.

He [Dr. E] cool, but he is so strict. I don't really get close to my principals because they principals. I don't want to get close to them. But, I'm close to him. I know he like me, 'cause he wouldn't have kept me here, 'cause I done did a lot of stuff here. I thank him for that. I'm grateful. But he do get on my last nerve. Now usually I woulda cussed the principal out already, but I wouldn't do that to him. But he a good principal. If he lost his principal job I'd fight for him. For real. He is a good principal. 'Cause all he really do is care about how you succeed. He's still going on about his life, but he do care about you at the end. –Helena, 10th grader.

Theme 2: Effective Schooling Correlates

The seven correlates of effective schooling: clear and focused school mission; safe and orderly environment; high expectations; opportunity; learn/time on task; instructional leadership; frequent monitoring of student progress; and positive home-school relations (pp.1-6) were developed by Dr. Edmonds (1979) and Dr. Lezotte (1991), for urban schools with populations that were 90% minority and served poor children. Implementation of these correlates improved the achievement scores of students.

Although these correlates were specified for traditional under-performing schools and inner-city schools, not alternative schools, Dr. E sensed that implementation of the correlates could support his goal of supporting students deemed incorrigible through and beyond high school. Although students did not articulate these correlates during my interviews with them, they did discuss and appreciate the benefits of a school that maintained an atmosphere of order, stability, and success.

My mindset is, education is the key. Education. Something you gotta have. You gotta be able to sit down and think, you know what I'm saying? Have thoughts, think out your problems. No matter what you're going through, you should always know that education is going to be your best friend. It's always going to be there for you. It's like grandma used to say, they can never take your education away from you, that's the only thing, they can't take it away. –Martin, 12th grader

Theme 3: Culturally Relevant Interactions

AHSDC had 88% students of color. Thus, staff believed it was necessary for race relations and racial history to be acknowledged, taught, and discussed. Teachers included the study of multiple cultures in the curriculum, which included field trips, school activities, rap sessions, and disciplinary meetings. Discussions around race were not feared or ignored, but were embraced (Ladson-Billings, 2009). The only complaints about AHSDC's racial discussions came from a few White parents whose children were biracial, expressing that race was discussed too often and too forcefully.

Martin, an older student, recognized that AHSDC's staff discussed race and racism in order to prepare students for a world where White men hold the majority power.

I like to hear it's a white man's world. That's a reality [preparing me]. More Black people need to team up. You gotta play the game. You need to know where you're going and what is expected. If you know where you're going and know what's expected. You can be prepared. –Martin, 12th grader

Theme 4: Warm Demanders

Dr. E mentioned that as an educator, he never wanted to be an enabler, so instead he practiced tough love. Students often described AHSDC staff members as being strict, but having their best interests at heart. This concept in which educators insist that students achieve with warmth is also known as being a warm demander (Bondy & Ross, 2008; Kleinfeld, 1972; Ross et al., 2008).

Helena explained her different experiences at AHSDC versus other traditional schools. She believed that AHSDC staff truly cared about students and their success.

AHSDC they more on you, they care more about you more than any other school. How usually schools is, they don't care about you, they just teach you and you get up and move on to the next. But at AHSDC they, I have to say they care about you. They really care if you succeed or not. –Helena, 10th grade

Theme 5: Addressing Non-Academic Needs

AHSDC staff understood that the students enrolled were not only in need of academic assistance, but also personal development. Students were sent to AHSDC to fill academic gaps and deficiencies; however, their emotional, cultural, and psychological well-being also needed to be addressed. Nurturing the whole student meant building trust and allowing for flexibility within the classroom (Foster, 1997; Noguera, 2003). Ms. Lana, the English teacher, explained that being an educator at AHSDC not only included teaching subject matter, but also being a counselor/social worker for students.

We need a social worker and counselor full-time. It wouldn't hurt if we had two, you know? Because the kids have issues and you know, it's just so MUCH. And sometimes just talking is, is soothing for some people, and they're like okay I can make it through another day. I am a teacher, a caring teacher, I'm a confidant, the students tell me so much and they know it's not going to get back anywhere. I would say that I have great expectations for them, for the students. And I try to make them believe in themselves, so that they can just be successful and be somebody important. –Ms. Lana, English Teacher

These five themes developed according to the initial research questions that guided this study. Table 6 explains this study's connection of findings and research questions.

Table 6. Connection of Findings and Research Questions

Research Questions	Findings
1) What occurs in this alternative school that supports students with behavior, academic, and truancy problems to persist, graduate from high school, and attend higher institutions of education?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Strong, Culturally Relevant, Authentic Leadership b. Effective Schooling Theory c. Culturally Relevancy d. Warm Demanding e. Addressing Non-Academic Needs
2) How does the school's culture and climate support these students' matriculation through high school and further pursuit of institutions of higher education?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Culturally Relevant Interactions b. Addressing Non-Academic Needs
3) What are the students' and staff members' daily lived experiences in this alternative school?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Strong, Culturally Relevant, Authentic Leadership b. Effective Schooling Theory c. Culturally Relevancy d. Warm Demanding e. Addressing Non-Academic Needs f. Institutional Racism and Vulnerability to District Budget Cuts. <p>(Bondy & Ross, 2008; Brown & Beckett, 2007; Edmonds, 1979; Foster, 1997; Kleinfeld, 1972; Khalifa, 2008; Ladson-Billings, 2009; Lezotte, 1991; Lomotey, 1989; Noguera, 2003; Paige & Witty, 2010; Ross et al., 2008).</p>

Social Action Approach: Unexpected Findings

The Problem: The Achievement Gap

The academic achievement gap was one that was discussed often within the Arcadia school district (Howard, 2010; Jencks & Phillips, 1989; Noguera, 2003; Paige & Witty, 2010). Students who were failing who fell into this gap were sent to AHSDC, where they experienced achievement. It is important to remember that AHSDC, under the leadership of Dr. E, believed they were diminishing the academic achievement gap that had been created in Arcadia school district. Below are teacher perspectives on why this achievement gap existed:

I think that's the reason why we have this academic gap that we have with Black and White kids. Because back in first and second grade, I feel like these teachers, a lot of these elementary teachers, females, they don't nurture our little black kids. Like they need to be nurtured and told you can be somebody and I expect it. –Ms. Lana, English Teacher

The Superintendent and School Board's Proposal

With less than six weeks left in the school year, AHSDC received word that Arcadia school district was financially in debt and needed budget cuts. A recommendation introduced at a board meeting was to close and/or consolidate AHSDC with other schools in the district.

A major finding from this study that I did not expect was the vulnerability that this school experienced with proposed budget cuts. I was fortunate to observe AHSDC students practice collective social action when their school was proposed to be consolidated or shut down (Banks & Banks, 2009).

The Bridge: Linking Daily Experiences to Experiences with the School Board

The experiences of this proposal to shut down AHSDC magnified and extended this study's five themes. Though students experienced anxiety, fear, depression and anger at the news of the proposal, AHSDC's environment supported student civic engagement, self-efficacy,

leadership, and control over their destiny (Banks & Banks, 2008). These two stories were linked and inseparable.

Question Posed to Students: “What Would You Do For Your Rights/School?”

The day after the proposal, Dr. E held a rap session with students and read the newspaper article explaining the proposal. This was an emotional rap session for students, staff, and me, as we felt AHSDC’s future was threatened.

Dr. E asked students if they cared enough to fight for their school. He then sat down and allowed students to discuss the state of their school and how they wanted to proceed. The male and female students of different races began to discuss how they could neither live nor be successful without AHSDC in its present location. Students recounted how they were treated badly and experienced failure at their traditional school, and they were afraid to return. After listening to students, I reminded them of Freedom Rider Mr. Randolph’s question that he posed a couple of months prior: “What would you do for your rights?” Similarly what would we at AHSDC do for our right to a quality education? I told students they had an opportunity now to stand up for their right to a quality education.

This was the student’s choice and this day set into motion the fight to keep AHSDC open and in its present location. I was most proud of the students because they were individuals still regaining their confidence and self-efficacy. They put aside their nervousness, brainstormed, fought and stood before board members to speak about why their school should not be closed or consolidated. Some board members were polite; others frowned at students, had side conversations and played on their phones. Yet, the students stood firm. This school’s atmosphere and 5 themes helped cultivate student leaders and activists, out of those once seen as deviants and failures.

The Community Organizer and Student Organization (AHOC)

Mr. Clark, history teacher, invited a friend who was a community organizer to meet with the students. Mr. George voluntarily met with students during their lunch hour and after school. He assisted them as they brainstormed ways to voice their opinions, in protest, to the school board. From this process the Alternative High Organizing Committee (AHOC) was formed. Students wrote letters to the school board members, made signs to hold up during school board meetings, and contacted a neighboring urban school that was going through similar assaults. AHSDC students asked this neighboring school if they could collaborate on strategies to help keep their schools open. Students even wrote a collective letter to Rachel Maddow, MSNBC news commentator, soliciting help. Before students heard back from Ms. Maddow, the school board's decision was made.

The Dialogue

Since this proposal was sudden, there was an on-going dialogue between the school board/superintendent and AHSDC staff, students, and supporters. The venues for this dialogue included AHSDC, board meetings, and budget meetings. The dialogues presented by some board members and the superintendent were ones that needed to be unpacked in dialogue with students. At these AHOC meetings, students discussed the tricky language being used to describe plans for the school. Students, with the help of staff and community members, discussed and responded to five main points that were assumed under this proposal. Table 7 displays this dialogue.

Table 7. Dialogue Between AHSDC and School Board

School Board's Statements	AHSDC's Rebuttal
AHSDC was segregationist and an issue of isolation, since this school houses a majority African-American students.	<u>Lack of understanding</u> : Those who were supporting this proposal had no knowledge of the history of the school or the structure. For example, the founder of the school placed students in this certain location in order to decrease skipping and truancy. In addition to the lack of history, few board members had even come to visit or observe practices at AHSDC.
This proposal was simply moving AHSDC to a new location and not dismantling the program.	<u>Power</u> : An individual could not make suggestions for changes to a school without having a complete understanding. Moving AHSDC would also definitely dismantle the strength of its programs and practices.
We, the board, understand what is best for you and AHSDC, so we must make hard decisions.	<u>Exclusion</u> : AHSDC principal, staff members, parents and students had no voice in this process. Yet they knew the most about this school.
When looking at test data, AHSDC's test scores are low, thus contributing to the concern of what learning is taking place at this school.	<u>Deceit-play on numbers</u> : The whole district, for over 30 years, had a steep racial academic achievement gap. Students brought hard data to board members showing how these achievement gaps were rampant in their traditional schools. A school (AHSDC) that takes only failing students bears the burden of pulling the students out of the gap. Additionally removing failing students from traditional schools removes those failing numbers in a misleading manner.
Test scores, not Grade Point Averages, are the deciding indicator of academic achievement.	<u>Bell Curve</u> : Test scores are only one piece of student achievement, and a faulty one at that, as the test is classist and racist.

Action: The Board Meeting

The board meetings were intense, but as a participant observer, I always left feeling proud of students. Out of the four board member meetings, I spoke at three as a community member. Eleven parents, nine staff members, 12 community members and 34 students also spoke. Students spoke from their personal experience; all of them invited the board to visit their school to see how it operated, and they concluded their speech by saying they were no longer part of the achievement gap. Numerous staff members, parents, community members, and students also wrote letters or attended budget meetings during this time.

The speeches given by students, staff members, parents/guardians and community members detailed why AHSDC should not be closed or consolidated. These reasons included the following: a principal who was caring yet a disciplinarian and a father figure (Brown & Beckett, 2007; Lomotey, 1989) ; AHSDC was safe, stable and disciplined (Edmonds, 1979; Lezotte, 1991); staff members cared, helped with non-academic and cultural issues, and were like family (Bondy & Ross, 2008; Ladson-Billings, 2009; Noguera, 2003).

The experiences of this proposal to shut down AHSDC magnified this study's five themes. Though students experienced anxiety, fear, depression and anger at the news of the proposal, AHSDC's environment supported student civic engagement, self-efficacy, leadership, and control over their destiny (Banks & Banks, 2008).

I was most proud of the students because they were individuals still regaining their confidence and self-efficacy. They put aside their nervousness and stood before board members to speak about why their school should not be closed or consolidated. Some board members were polite; others frowned at students, had side conversations and played on their phones. Yet, the

students stood firm. I transcribed all the board meetings' speeches. I found it important to include speeches of the student and staff participants who spoke, as this was part of their lived experiences (see Appendix R).

Board Meeting Speeches

Students, parents, community members and staff filled the board meetings so much, there was no sitting room. Students wore their black AHSDC school t-shirts and stood behind the podium, in view of news cameras with signs protesting the board's proposal. Dr. E and staff members, such as Mr. Shaw, Mr. Turner, Mr. Clark and Ms. Karla, stood next to students to support them as they spoke.

When Martin spoke, he explained how AHSDC saved him from becoming a statistic. He said AHSDC was the family he did not have, and he felt this assault on AHSDC was similar to having his family gunned down. Following his speech, he shook Dr. E's hand and gave him a hug:

Hello, I want to get straight to the point. Without AHSDC I would be dead or in jail. (Pause) Without AHSDC I would be dead or in jail. I said it twice. Once so you can understand how devastating that would be for me, to be a statistic. And I said it again for myself to know that I passed it because of AHSDC, and this man standing right next to me [Dr. E]. Since I have a time limit now and last time I came up here, I didn't have a time limit. So to make a long story short. I witnessed my father get shot at the age of nine, if you read the National Press you will see that I am in the paper for that, and my mom is currently in and out of the jail and her due date is next month. And I have a brother and three sisters. And AHSDC is a family and they took care of me, they kept me under their wing. They pushed me to go to College. Since they pushed me to go to college I will be attending Wescott University, and also I have a six-year scholarship full ride. So to just make it clear without the AHSDC family, coming from where I didn't have a family, they made me a man. They made me be a person that can take care of my family, and I can take care of other's families because I have the opportunity to go to college to change the world. And I just wanted to say that I had trouble reading this, because I'm kind of upset because this is my family, and when your family is being

basically gunned down you feel it in your heart. I want to come off the heart so bad. I couldn't even read this right. I took my time to write this. I had help because that's what I get at AHSDC, but I'm kind of shaken up because my family is being gunned down right now and I don't like that. But, I just want to say please keep AHSDC open for everybody.
–Martin, 12th grader

Debriefing Potential Fate of AHSDC

Nina believed the proposal had to do with the school's racial makeup and smaller size.

She felt if the school closed, many dreams would be broken.

I'd be sad. I cannot picture myself without AHSDC because it help me so much and it help my friends. So it's just kinda like a family for me, and if they close it I know a lot of people are going to lose track of themselves. Why this is happening? Because we're the smallest school. We basically have a reputation that we have bad kids and probably because of the scores the test or whatever. But, they [school board] just bored; they just want to mess with somebody to be happy I guess. I mean this is the school that has most Black students or whatever, and they probably think that we don't need a school for people that are bad or something. Basically if they close this [AHSDC] down they just gonna destroy dreams. –Nina, 11th grader

Jocelyn explained that AHSDC gave students a second chance to change their lives:

I love AHSDC and you know, I really hope we can do whatever we can, so they the board, change their mind. Because what everybody should have, is a chance. Like people who are like struggling should be able to have like a second chance, because AHSDC it changes people, like for real. –Jocelyn, 12th grader

Staff Members' Perspectives: During AHSDC's Fight to Stay Open

When examining the lived experiences, I could not exclude how students and staff were affected by this proposal. Social Worker Mr. Carlos explained the emotional toll this assault had on AHSDC students. AHSDC always offered structure and consistency prior to this proposal:

The announcement of AHSDC being on the table for being closed? It caused students to become more emotionally charged, in a way that I don't think they were able to handle. Because it [AHSDC] was a sense of family, a sense of security and a safe place that they know they can come for help. Somewhere they can get the assistance that they need, to achieve their goals. And this was being taken away from them without another option.

And it did not happen in a way where they could dialogue or talk about their feelings or their thoughts. It was just announced all of a sudden, it was abrupt. So therefore it caused a lot of different emotions: rage, anxiety, students were upset, were hurt, they were discouraged, and began giving up. And it took a different toll on them, because they're already dealing with a variety challenges emotionally, behaviorally, academically, which is why they're here. And yet, they have found some sense of success here. –Mr. Carlos, social worker

Mr. Clark, who played a pivotal role in helping students organize against this proposal, discussed how AHSDC was affected:

It's added stress. We are already working with kids who have plenty of stressors in their lives. You know on one level they're definitely like resilient, we think about all the things that has happened to them. But they're also at that tipping point, so one extra thing just jams them up, and that was frustrating. They lash out at the closest people which are their teachers, and people that care about them. Even though they consciously know that we care about the same things. I think that a lot of the kids really felt abandoned. Many of them already have abandonment issues, and like the most fragile of them, you know are the ones that suffered the most out of this. –Mr. Clark, history teacher

The School Board's Vote

After the first board meeting at which students spoke, some board members dismissed their speeches as mere testimonials, instead of factual data, and nothing that required action from them. So at the next board meeting, powerful community members spoke and threatened to vote board members out if they continued to push proposals that lacked equity. The board voted 4-2 to keep AHSDC open and at its present location. The board “found” \$500,000 to cover the school's debt.

Institutional Racism

AHSDC students, staff, parents, and community members believed that a school where predominantly students of color were achieving being threatened for closure was a prime example of institutionalized racism. Staff did not believe that the proposal was an issue of the budget, but instead an issue of equity. Mr. Ray said,

To save the school. That was an outstanding experience as an adult in the building. And just kind of getting that feel of political activism, that you don't really get a chance to experience if you haven't grown up in the 70s. You have a chance to experience that fight, as a group, against institutional racism, and that is what we interpret it as. So it was nice being a part of that political activism. I enjoyed that and it is because I think it is so entrenched in Arcadia that idea of institutional racism, and that is what we interpret it as. So it was nice being a part of that political activism. I enjoyed it because I think it is so entrenched in Arcadia, that idea of institutional racism, and they [the school board] can't get outside of themselves to see it. Those in power. There is no way that they would even be able to see that from where they sit. They'd vehemently disagree there's any type of racism in the district. –Mr. Ray, English teacher

Mr. Shaw described the motive behind the proposal as institutional racism:

We're [Arcadia district] a reflection of society. I can't speak for all schools, but I say this, Our school district does not care about the one third of the kids, so as long as they can say well we're sending two thirds of our kids off to college. If the achievement gap between Asians and Caucasians was as wide as it is between them and African-Americans, this town would raise holy hell. We would never publicly say it, and I get yelled at when I do publicly say it, that there is an unwritten sort of thing. But there's a segment of the population in our district and I'm sure it's probably too many districts, that we don't care about. That 1/3, for whatever reason we don't care. –Mr. Shaw, science teacher

CONCLUSION

Although critics say small studies such as this one are not generalizable, a generalizability argument may be made using case-to-case transfer. This means that this study's findings may offer insight to similar populations, such as at-risk, low-income, and students of color in traditional or alternative schools (Firestone, 1993).

During this fight with the school board, a common argument from AHSDC supporters was to stop blaming the student and start examining the institution. Students who came to AHSDC had similar backgrounds regarding experienced failure in traditional schools. The students who stayed at AHSDC and bought into this school's vision started experiencing an academic turnaround to higher grades and higher state mandated test scores. There was

something special about the school and what they had to offer students. However, despite AHSDC's academic achievement, it was vulnerable, and it was the only school placed on the chopping block.

Ms. Karla, during a speech to the school board members and superintendent, said the following concerning Dr. E and the alienation he experienced as a principal. She later mentioned that this "evaluation" planned had already been conducted 15 years ago:

It is been good to hear that AHSDC has been given a reprieve while this administration evaluates our program this fall. My concern is it may be too little, too late. You have alienated a highly educated principal, whose dissertation for his doctorate was ironically based on best practices for closing the achievement gap. He has brought a lot of great ideas and energy to our program. However, the direction central administration wants to take us in, is very discouraging. And frankly, he and our teachers want no part of it. –Ms. Karla, counselor liaison

I asked myself, why would a school district attempt to close a school that yields positive outcomes to diminish the achievement gap? For me, as an educator, it became painfully clear that achievement for all students was a goal in word, yet not followed with action.

It just breaks my heart. These kids that need the most, are the first ones that they [school board] go after. Someone said that they cut the safety net first, you know? These, at AHSDC, are the kids that need the social safety net, otherwise they end up in prison or homeless. – Mr. Clark, history teacher

It is not enough to say that more of these small schools need to be developed, or that traditional schools need to use these practices, because this achievement gap is ingrained in the district. There must be institutional changes that affect the hiring of superintendents, school board members, and educators, in traditional as well as in alternative schools. If institutional racism is not addressed at all of these levels, it makes it particularly difficult for alternative schools such as AHSDC to remain operating, even when they are clearly making a positive difference in the lives of the students.

What I Learned, Implications, and Recommendations for Moving Forward

First, I learned that Effective Schooling Theory as a theoretical framework was not sufficient alone for students of color in alternative schools. Yet, there was a cultural relevant component missing from this Effective Schooling model. Below are implications connected to Effective Schooling Theory and inclusive of Cultural Relevancy Theory.

The five findings and practices from this study need to be replicated and transferred into traditional and alternative schools. This includes strong leadership, effective schooling theory, culturally relevant practices, staff members who are warm demanders, and student development that focuses on non-academic needs as well as academic achievement (Bondy & Ross, 2008; Brown & Beckett, 2007; Edmonds, 1979; Foster, 1997; Kleinfeld, 1972; Khalifa, 2008; Ladson-Billings, 2009; Lezotte, 1991; Lomotey, 1989; Noguera, 2003; Paige & Witty, 2010; Ross et al., 2008). .

Next, institutional racism, privilege, and power and their impact on practices in school districts need to be acknowledged, discussed, examined, and eradicated. There needs to be a sense of urgency as a district in diminishing the achievement gap (Kohl, 1994; Ladson-Billings, 2009; Noguera, 2006; Paige & Witty, 2010).

Lastly, students, parents, and community members should have a genuine voice in school reform. Because small schools such as AHSDC are vulnerable. These schools need strong, present, and ongoing community support, which includes fundraising, activism and socially aware board members. See Chapter 7 (Ladson-Billings, 2009; Noguera, 2003).

Future Research

While reviewing the alternative school literature, there were gaps in examining the positive outcomes and the cultural environment for alternative students of color. The following are recommended as future research studies that surround the theoretical framework of Effective Schooling Theory and Cultural Relevancy within Alternative Schools. There is a need for: qualitative and quantitative studies focused on expansion of the Effective Schooling model; qualitative and quantitative studies focused on alternative schools that house majority students of color and the impact of race and other identity markers, such as gender and class upon these students; quantitative studies focused on student's experiences in alternative schools; comparative studies of school districts concerning the academic achievement gap; and finally qualitative studies of school boards and their interactions with alternative schools.

CHAPTER 7

UPDATES

Raynard was dismissed from school during the last trimester, after being accused of stealing a classmate's iPad. I was told that this was not the first instance of him stealing at AHSDC. Since his dismissal, Raynard continued to call Dr. E for admittance; but he was told that until he took responsibility for stealing, he could not return to AHSDC.

Following high school graduation, **Jocelyn** and **Martin** attended separate four-year State Universities. **Yeltsin** enrolled in a local community college.

During the summer, **Jack** moved back to the East Coast with family members. Dr. E reported that he was on track to graduate and was doing well.

Helena showed tremendous growth in her temperament and attitude from our first to our last interview. However, Ms. Brenda shared that Helena regressed to negative behaviors with no summer AHSDC session. Helena left the following fall after refusing to stop taking illegal drugs.

Nina and **Tonya** graduated the following year. They both enrolled in local community colleges.

Currently all staff participants remained, with the exception of Ms. Lana, who retired yet volunteers weekly, and Mr. Klein, who was moved to a middle school after the PE/Health program was cut due to district budget restraints.

Five Months Later

One afternoon, while at home transcribing student and staff interviews, I received a voicemail from AHSDC's social worker Mr. Carlos. Yeltsin, who had just graduated months earlier, was in an automobile accident. I quickly dropped what I was doing and rushed to the hospital. When I arrived, I heard Yeltsin's mom crying, and I saw family members comforting

her. Dr. E was looking off into a distance with a sorrowful look on his face. Mr. Carlos updated me. Yeltsin's car had been hit head-on by an SUV and they believed him to be brain-dead from the collision and trauma. As time went by, more AHSDC staff arrived, joining Yeltsin's family, including his younger brother and cousin, who were also AHSDC students. Around 10:00 that evening Yeltsin was pronounced dead.

The next day, I accompanied staff members to the hospital again, as they were keeping Yeltsin on life support in hopes that his father would arrive from Mexico. Dr. E and Ms. Brenda brought breakfast food to family members, and they began to discuss funeral plans. Yeltsin's mother's home was already overflowing with family and guests, so additional family stayed with Dr. E in his home. Grief counselors were asked to come to AHSDC for the next few days, to support students.

Dr. E wrote the obituary, and Ms. Gabriella, administrative assistant, worked on Yeltsin's funeral program and made sure copies were published in English and Spanish. We all looked for pictures of Yeltsin to combine with family photos.

The day of the funeral was a heavy one for us all. Students and staff members filled the funeral home for the service, which was conducted in Spanish. Following the service, family and friends gathered in AHSDC's gym for the repast. Yeltsin's mother, who spoke limited English, said the following after the service: "We are all family."

One Year Later

The superintendent and board members remained quiet for close to an entire year. However, it was no surprise that yet again in the month of April, the same proposal to close AHSDC was on the table, yet presented in a different manner. This time, instead of sending one third of AHSDC students into three traditional schools, the board's proposal was to place all of

AHSDC inside of a traditional high school, with separate entrances in the back of the building. Again, community members, staff, and students gathered, wrote letters, gave speeches, and addressed the board and superintendent regarding how this proposal was entrenched with inequity, secrecy, and underhandedness.

The superintendent and board members retracted their proposal, and to the relief of many, the superintendent retired. However, AHSDC did lose its Art and PE/Health programs. Because of this attack, there was a community support group developed by older retired members with high levels of social capital. The group was called “Friends of AHSDC.” This group was developed to meet bi-weekly to protect, fundraise, and stand in solidarity with AHSDC, to ensure that this school stays open and in its present location and building.

Friends of AHSDC’s Purpose Statement:

We come together to provide consistent and sustaining support for the Alternative High’s Student Development Center. We are a collective voice advocating for those whose voice is often unheard or misunderstood. We seek to build community understanding of the role that this alternative learning environment plays in our school system’s quest to successfully educate all of our youth. We further seek to enhance and expand the resources required by the Center as it assists students in the development of academic and social skills necessary for future success. (Friends of AHSDC, 2013)

I am AHSDC

I am strongly against the idea of AHSDC getting shut down or even moved to another school, because AHSDC is a diversified family. We are a successful school because we work together. This school should remain open and in the same location, because kids are used to coming here and get more help from teachers. And, also because students here at AHSDC feel and are safe because of the small number of students.

I'm a senior at AHSDC and to be honest, I would never graduated if it wasn't for Dr. E and my teachers who gave me a chance to come to this school. They helped me a lot to be where I am at right now. I am sure that if I would have came here in my Freshman year, or at least in my sophomore year then I would of done much better; but my point is that AHSDC is much more helpful to me than my home school, Yellowstone High.

Even though I am a senior and I graduate this May, I would really like this school remain open, because I know what this school can do for students like me, who struggle with classes and things like that. I would of liked to come to the school board meetings to show my appreciation for what they [AHSDC] have done for me and for a lot of students. But I had to work.

People want to make decisions without taking in consideration of how it's affecting others. If this school gets moved to another school it will lower the chances of students graduating, lower the motivation of students coming to school. And it would also create more problems with students in the other school that would be put together with this one.

I would like to see this school remain open after I graduate. I want to see my brothers come to this school, and do as well as me, and even better because they have the chance of coming. But only if this school remains open.

I am no longer a part of the "achievement gap."

-Yeltsin

APPDENDICES

Appendix A

Demographics

Table 8. AHSDC's Demographics

Demographics	Number/Percentage
Eligible for free lunch	65%
Eligible for reduced lunch	5%
Academic and/or behaviorally at-risk	90%
Special Education/IEP	49%
Students of Color	88%
Males	55%
Females	45%
Total number of students	98*
Black/African American	70*
White/Caucasian	20*
Hispanic/Latino	10*
Hawaiian Pacific Islander	6*
Asian	10*
American Indian	8*

*Students who identify as multiracial are represented into multiple categories under the total number of students

Appendix B

Sample Interview Questions Principal

1. Tell me a little bit about yourself as an educator and your educator history.
2. The first time we met, you mentioned the name Dr. Ron Edmonds. Would you tell me a little about him?
3. Describe your teaching/educating/learning philosophy. Why do you believe this?
4. How would your student's describe you as a principal?
5. What are the biggest challenges and strengths of AHSDC students?
6. Can you define (in your eyes) the term success?
7. You have a reputation in district for tough love. Describe how you enforce tough love.
8. Can you share with me the history of AHSDC? How did this school start?
9. When did you arrive at AHSDC? How was the school operating before you came?
10. Why did you take this job at AHSDC? What did you inherit by coming to AHSDC?
11. What philosophical ideals did you keep or change within AHSDC after taking over?
12. How is discipline handled at your school?
13. Describe your interactions with parents/guardians?

Staff Members

1. Tell me a little bit about yourself as an educator and your history.
2. Describe your teaching/educating/learning philosophy and why?
3. Why was AHSDC created? Why did you take this job at AHSDC?
4. Describe a typical day at AHSDC.
5. What has been a memorable AHSDC moment?
6. Describe the support programs/benefits/disciplines offered at AHSDC?
7. Describe the student's biggest strengths and challenges at AHSDC?
8. Describe how these strengths and challenges are rewarded and remedied?
9. Describe, if it applies, the school environment under the two different principals.
10. Describe your interactions with parents/guardians?

Students

1. Describe your story/journey from kindergarten until now.
2. How would you describe yourself as a student (past and present)?
3. What is the purpose of AHSDC?
4. Describe what has been your biggest triumph in school?
5. Describe your biggest challenge in school?
6. What are the differences between AHSDC and your traditional schools?
7. Who (educator) has been involved in your schooling? How?
8. If I were a student who had to choose between AHSDC, Saddle and Cillside Alternative High school. Which would you recommend and why?

Appendix C

Sample Interview with Ms. Lana, English teacher

[Before interview, Ms. Lana shared that students were relaying deep problems to their teachers, and it's a counseling hat that teacher's must put on].

CD: It's February 16th thank you for letting me interview you. Can you tell me a little bit about your educator history?

Ms. Lana: I'm originally from a little small-town in Missouri; I went to high school there. Graduated from high school and attended at that time Missouri State Teacher's college. Now it's called Truman University. I taught in Illinois, but went back to finish up my Masters in English literature. I got married and had a daughter. I taught middle school and high school English. I got a divorce and moved to [present State]. I started as a substitute then taught for one year covering a teacher who had pneumonia at Prescott High. I Came here to AHSDC and have been here ever since. Been here at least 18 years.

CD: What was the school like in Illinois that you taught at?

Ms. Lana: It was a regular school not alternative, seventh and eighth graders. I coached girl's track and field. It was a good school system that promoted students and education was important. They didn't have a lot of African American students. White students mostly. Even in Missouri there was not a lot of diversity of other racial minorities. Mainly White.

CD: What would you say your teaching philosophy was or is?

Ms. Lana: My teaching philosophy is that you have to learn how to develop relationships with students. Once you develop your relationships with the students and, just you can trust them and can go a lot further with students. And then once you do that, they all want to learn. You don't have to push them quite as hard because at the end of the day, you really care about them and their education. That's what I found. I discovered that. Mr. Joe he used to be the principal here, he was the one that taught me that. He sat me down one time and he said Lana, what you need to do he said is develop relationships with the students, and once you develop relationships you can get them to do anything you want, within reason and it's true. I found that to be true.

CD: So you were here when Mr. Joe was here, are there any differences/similarities between leadership styles?

Ms. Lana: The school was already in existence when I moved here to [present State]. And how I came to AHSDC is interesting because I was subbing. I was a permanent sub over at Prescott High School. And then so the lady that I subbed for was coming back the next year. So the principal, Mr. Parker was his name over at Prescott, at that time he talked to Mr. Joe and said I've

got a really good English teacher. I gotta let her go because the teacher that she's covering for is coming back next year. Mr. Joe called me up and asked me to come up to the old building. We were in the old building for an interview, and he said you're hired (laughs) after we talked.

Originally, it was just like one building and it was just a straight, and you could stand at one end, and look down the hallway and see everything. But I happened to be in a trailer. It was a new trailer, so I liked it. It was on the grass, actually back that way [points toward outside]... It was here... that old building they were in. The little building long before I got here... And we had some parents, the way I understand how the history went, parents that really said it's time that our kids get, you know a new building.

Okay, well the atmosphere was, one thing you have to know for sure more than anything Mr. Joe. He was no-nonsense, he really wanted the students to do their best, strive to be the best that you could be and so he was a no-nonsense kind of person. It was interesting because when I first started teaching here he was like in his prime, and up and running and really full of energy and I could see the closer he got to his retirement he acted like he wanted to be everybody's grandparent you know what I mean? It was because he had slowed down. But when I first came to the building man, he was fierce he really, really was. And I respected him and some people didn't toward the latter years.

[Down at Administration Building] They respected him and they weren't gonna run over him. It got toward the end where people really disliked him, because I think he really meant well. But sometimes you have to know, in order, to get along in society, you got to know when to hold them and when to fold them. You got to know when to speak out and sometimes just hold your peace and wait until the timing is right.

But here's why I respected him. Because as long as you're doing your job you had nothing, nothing to be uneasy about. And I've always been a teacher, I'm going to do my job. I'm going to do exactly what the principal is asking me to do. I'm going to meet deadlines. I'm going to, you know, do what I need to do. So then the principal doesn't have to be on me about things, you know, because you're doing what you're doing and they won't bother you. And he never would bother me about anything. I think he respected me a great deal, because he knew I was all about being professional and taking care business, and he trusted me as an educator.

And then when Dr. E came along, Dr. E, he's Scholastic. He wants the students to, let's go to college let's be the best that we can be. And he's a younger, a lot of his philosophies agree with Mr. Joe. But he's just younger, more energy, you know? I think both of them are excellent principals. And I feel fortunate to be working with them, you know? Because it's a miserable situation where you have no respect for your principal, you know? [Because it starts at the top], uh huh it trickles down.

CD: So why did you take this job at AHSDC?

Ms. Lana: It was the alternative students. I knew it was going to be students with issues. But what I really liked, smaller class sizes. Because my largest class is only 16 students; whereas, when I was at Prescott that whole year, my class you have 25 and 30 in a room, 25 to 30. And as an English teacher just imagine you assign a given essay, how many papers you have to grade. And then even along with that, I like this school because, smaller class sizes. You get to know the students you can really get to know the students. And we've got 25 and 30 in room, it takes you forever to really get to know the students, you know? But when you've got 15 and 16, sometimes you know, you just have 10...and with the issues students have you know? I can't even imagine having 30 students with the issues some of these students have. I mean it'd be crazy...

CD: What courses are you teaching?

Ms. Lana: Okay, I teach two American lit classes, and one African-American lit, and one 9th grade English.

CD: what's the difference between American lit and African American lit?

Ms. Lana: Well for the American lit you're covering a broader span of writers, including many whites, but me being African-American. I filter in some of my African American writers into my American lit. Because when you have a larger high school they'll have a few. Maybe Langston Hughes, maybe Ralph Ellison, they will study a few of them. But here, I'm reversing the situation. We're studying quite a few of them in my classes. I love African American lit, I love it, that class the best. But you know and I was telling a young lady, because right now my classes, my students are doing, one class is doing African-American reports on African American scientists and inventors. One's doing African-American writers, and other two are doing educators, African-American educators. So what I was telling them, that one young lady gave her, her report, her oral presentation on Langston Hughes. And I told her, he's my man. I love him. I told her if I were to go back and get a doctorate, it will be centering around him: Langston Hughes and his words.

CD: [Told her I had heard about her before I came to AHSDC as a student favorite]. Describe time in your classroom with students/typical day

Ms. Lana: Well what I try to do is try to let them know that "*we're in this together*" and if you want a B in this class, okay let's work toward it. That's the grade we're gonna get. You can do it, and I encourage them. And a lot of these young people that I encourage, because I'm a mother. I have one daughter who graduated from CMU, now living in Virginia. But you know, I just encourage them. When they do well enough. I still got this, you'd think I was an elementary

teacher, when they get A's or A - on their papers, I still, "way to go" put stickers on the papers. I'm proud of you. All of that. Just trying to encourage them to be the best that they can.

Sometimes I break away from my lesson plans and we talk about things that are impacting African-American people. They've got to know the relevance of society today, the past. But they need to know. Like we stopped and talked about Whitney Houston. The impact of her death and her daughter. We talked about all of that, and then I go back to what I am doing.

This morning when I woke up all my lesson plans were, I knew what was going to do in class. But I knew that Dr. E asked for these "Red Tail" papers tomorrow. And I know students were not going to have it, they're not going to have it in. Then Dr. E's going to be upset and he's gonna feel like we the mentors didn't do our job. So what I'm doing with my classes, four classes we're gonna work on it today we're going to work on it in class. I'm giving them the opportunity to work on these. Now first block was really appreciative, second block I think they were appreciative, and now I'm going to fourth block and fifth block.

Because after all African-American history is not just in February. As far as I'm concerned it's every day, all year long.

And they seem to know the answers, you know what, they do they seem to know the answers. The problem is they're just not taking the time at home. Part of it, some of them don't have viable computers at home. The other thing is, the other thing is, that they're trying to do the other class work you know? It's trying to balance, and our students are not good at balancing.

CD: Why do you think AHSDC was created?

Ms. Lana: Well I don't know if anybody told you this, but it used to be called bad ass high school. Because years, this was long before I came on the scene, but Mr. Joe told me, he said that because you had your real bad kids that are, that nobody wanted to do and so they were predominately us and poor class white folks too. And they say they said, that it was just called bad ass high school but then Mr. Joe worked with students and staff we've gotten away from that. Now parents will call Dr. E and ask him if they can come, come by recommendation. They want to come here they want to come here. And I saw that change over like they may be maybe a good 6,7,8 years ago parent started. Mr. Joe, saying can my child please come to your school? I know they're going to get cared for. I know the teachers are not gonna let him just schlep off and not do anything. So can my son just come to your school? So now you know Dr. E told us, he said his 25 students on the waiting list to come here, and I believe that. Because some of students that we have now, that are just slow dragging and not getting the work done. He may have let them go so we can have benefits of some students who really want to try.

And over the years since I've been teaching here I have noticed that we're getting more and more students going towards college. When I first came here like the first three or four years I was her,

it was like we were just happy get them to graduate from high school... But more and more I see Dr. E really pushes. He wants to see those acceptance letters from universities and colleges you know for these students. And so this is a good thing, it's a good thing....

Like I say to students all the time it's what you got on the inside of you. If you got push, push and you got, you know, I always say a burning desire inside yourself. A fire in your belly. You could do anything you want in life. Once people see that you are really focused and you wanna be better, they start giving money, pushing you along. Because adults recognize a student who's trying. Like Martin, just that coming out in the newspaper, you know people say: this young man, he's sincere, has been through a lot. I'm going to help him, let me help him best I can. And so I say to students all the time, when people see that you really are serious about your education, you want to go far, they help. They will support you, they will support you.

CD: So what would you say are the biggest challenges that students here at AHSDC face?

Ms. Lana: That they face? What I think they face is they don't always have the, the family support they need. And then some of the our students I don't know if it's, I think in some case that some of their parents smoke weed. And so we've got a lot of weed smokers and they hate to hear me say, okay that's the reason why you're lethargic today because you must've had weed, and now you don't want me to push you to make sure you get your assignment done. And I talk to them all the time, they say well if God put it on earth why can't we have it? Because maybe it is good for glaucoma or something like that, but for you, for your mind, your mind needs to be fresh. You don't need anything tampering with your mind or your body like that. So I'm constantly telling them that. They need to be the best of all. They don't necessarily buy it, buy into what I'm saying, but it's difficult. [Helena] she told me, Ms. Lana if you ever come to my house, first thing at the front door you will smell weed. Because we all smoke it. She said my mom smokes it, and I smoke it too. My mom's boyfriend smokes it, so they just smoke it just like it's regular cigarettes or something... Like it's candy... I think that students when you talk to them, they're quite a few of them have parents who smoke. So the kids are around it.

Raynard tells me that that, I have you met him yet? He says that the way he copes... That's the way I cope. See I'm going to tell you something else, a lot of these hassles and other problems they don't have a dad in their life and they got their mothers. Now like I told my fourth block, cause I have a lot of boys in that class. I said you guys, I know it's difficult and you should really give your mother some slack, because it's hard for women it's difficult to raise boy children, when you are female. And then there's no male around to help you, or support. And so you dealing with that, and that's difficult. And I said so you have to cut your mom some slack because she's trying to raise you. Y'all think you're grown already, and she's not getting any assistance from you all dads because some of these dads don't come around. They don't come around so the boys you know, they don't have that role model and they're scared to trust

somebody. Like Dr. E says this to them all the time you got us. But them boys you know, they were scared to trust, some of them some of them.

[Tell the example of Xavim was having difficulties with his mom whose dad was not around. He needed to talk to Mr. Carlos, social worker at AHSDC]

... We need a social worker and counselor full-time. It wouldn't hurt if we had two, you know? Because the kids have issues and you know you can't, it's just so MUCH.... And sometimes just talking is, is soothing for some people, and they're like okay I can make it through another day, you know?

CD: What type of educational philosophy is needed for AHSDC and its students?

Ms. Lana: It is holistic and people who don't believe that are sometimes they're running as a deficit as being an educator, because I think you have to think about that entire child. The more you get to know that entire child, the better you can work with them. That's how their trust is built and a lot of kids say they don't trust some white teachers, because the white teachers don't make an effort to get to know them, and just you know just show concern, and caring and so that's the reason why there's a big, and sometimes I think that's the reason why we have this academic gap, that we have with blacks and whites kids. Because back in first and second grade, I feel like these teachers, a lot of these elementary teachers... females... They don't, they don't nurture our little black kids like they need to be nurtured and told: you can be somebody and I expect it.

CD: [shares what Ms. Tracee said about special education being pushed on black kids at Slanter, a local Middle School]

Ms. Lana: ...And then you're right you know if you look at the young people as like your kids, and how you'd like YOUR kids to be treated. Then you'll treat them better.

CD: Here at AHSDC do you feel like all the teachers are on the same page with their philosophy like yours? And you don't have to say names.

Ms. Lana: I would say in this building cause I know each one of them real well, we do. Teachers here are more giving then like when I was at Prescott High... a lot of those teachers were making the paycheck honey and that's all that mattered to them. Slap them [students] through. But here because you are forced to deal with students, so to speak because of small class sizes, I think because Joe and now Dr. E, I think that most of them and I really mean this, really care I really do. And I think they really, I will say they all understand circumstances, black kids circumstances. But they're willing to work, go at least a quarter of a mile for them.

CD: What's a typical day here at AHSDC?

Ms. Lana: Most days are pretty decent, but you know I'm one of these teachers if something is going on in the air and atmosphere, if something happens in the cafeteria, we do what we need to do to get that cleared out before we try to learn. Because I'm telling you it so difficult to teach them anything until you clear the air. And then you have problems students like Helena... She comes in almost 4-5 days, she's gonna have that issue. And it's usually, you know she's either going off, she don't know why she has to go home... Her uniform wasn't the right one... And she always has issue... That's when our job becomes difficult, dealing with students that she's one of those repeated problems. Her problems are repeated every day, something going on with her. If you catch her on a good day, like yesterday she was typing on her paper and then she looked at me and she gave me a smile. And I was like oh what do? (laughs)... I don't know how to react you know? So I gave her pretty smile back.

CD: Describe some of the experience of females of color students?

Ms. Lana: It is and then also they are going through, a lot of them don't have a dad in their house either. A good dad will promote his daughters and act like they're princesses and all that. These girls don't have that. Many of them are into weaves and wigs and more weaves and everything like that. I say that Self-esteem issue, I think they felt prettier with all that. So the bottom line is that I think, that girls want to get attention from a boy, because they don't have their dad in the home to validate that they really are somebody special. So then they try to get it from a boyfriend. Some of them, some of them smoke weed too now. And some of them you know, I identify with the girls cause I raised a daughter. So I pretty much know where they are. Now the boys see, cause I didn't raise a son, so it's more difficult for me to figure them out.

CD: [Shares the story about the teen who's aspirate was to be a backup dancer for Chris Brown and young lady]. Do you find that their Self-efficacy/aspirations are expanded or limited for your female students?

Ms. Lana: Well, well this is interesting because the senior girls the Negro business and professional women's club sent me some applications... They said they'll give scholarships to females and males. Seniors planning on going to college this fall 2004 2012 so I started passing them off to students. Said to them don't waste my time and don't even waste this application. I said, because if you aren't planning on going then don't even take one of these applications... I've had several girls come to me and say that they wanted an application. So we'll see what that's all about. Last year my sorority give our applications Dr. E and I, he and I we were really pushing the students every scholarship that came across to him or to me. We were making sure that the students found it, the seniors... They didn't know how to fill it out, so that we had to take time out to make sure they were filling them out correctly, you know? Especially when it came to that 150-200 letter word essay.

CD: Of the curriculum taught in your class what are the expectations?

Ms. Lana: Well I expect for them to first of all, like for my ninth grade class they're something's that I've gotta teach. Romeo and Juliet and To kill a Mockingbird.... In my literature classes they say that, you know they got some guidelines that you gotta do. Make sure you're giving them plenty of essays to do. Make sure you have some diversity in the literature program. And so what I do is, I have found that working at AHSDC I have had to, I give students assignments and then I give them a deadline. I let them more or less work during class. Now, like because we do a lot of writing essays and this last semester I'm going to teach a research paper... I know I'm biting off so much, because these kids have never done one.

Do you know Tonya? If she would just pull away from being so ghetto, like being kind of ghetto-ish. Like I think that she has potential to do well I really do. Yet people like Jocelyn she's, she's lazy so I have to push her. She's, she's a good student but you never know when she's gonna perform on you or she'll just get lazy and so, And I'm really nervous for her going to college, cause she'll learn, she'll learn, but she's got potential.

CD: What role does race plays in lives of your students?

Ms. Lana: Cause on Wednesday when we have our rap sessions it's a wonderful way to have race, we talk about race. And even when the other principal was here Mr. Joe oh yeah we talked about race all the time. So then nobody's embarrassed about it because everybody's, everybody's kind of comfortable in their own skin. Because they know, we're gonna talk about it and you know? We talk about so much to where people are comfortable. Students don't have a problem here, I think because they don't feel like anyone is looking down their nose at them, you know?

CD: What interaction do you hold with parents/guardians?

Ms. Lana: They work with you, but the thing of it is, sometimes they don't even work at all. Cause even like the National Parent Day he sent all those e-mails out, but I told him I said Dr. E, we don't have the middle class or above parents I said. So if we don't give them phone calls, you know? The previous National parent day days we would have lots of parents when Mr. Joe was here. We had a lady was just in charge. She was in charge of NAAPID day... We would have a whole meal for the parents and even the students. You know I told Dr. E on the Friday before hand, I said you know they're not gonna be too many parents because first of all you e-mailed them so they can choose to ignore it. Even if they got e-mail they can choose to ignore it...

What we had on Monday [national parent day], was a poorest number of parents we've ever had. We used to have parents oozing in and out coming and visiting, sitting in your classroom. You know just being a part of it, but we didn't have that because the parent here a lot of them are younger parents. Not really looking after their kids like they should some of them are working a couple of jobs and they're tired.

But if you call, then cause what I found when I call them, they do seem interested and I have issue with their child. And if I say that your child is staying after school, they seem to be okay enough, you know? So I've never had a parent, Because, I think parents know, by and large that the teachers here really are concerned and Dr. E are concerned about their child.

Well I'll tell you what I used to do when Mr. Joe was here. I would call them more often but, and I don't call them as often as I could. Because a lot of my students, many, many of my students are passing. But it is good to call parents though just to give them a compliment about their kid, you know. If you find time to do that is a great thing, because, parents are just caught off guard. That is really a good thing to do, and I need to do more that I really do.

CD: How does social economic status affect AHSDC students?

Ms. Lana: It does I mean. Like 60 percent, yeah free and reduced lunch. But a lot of these kids front like they got it really going on, and they don't. This is what I said to Dr. E about these "Red Tail" papers. Some of them they have a laptop or computer at home, but it might be on the blink, not working well, they don't have a printer. But when they get home, they do not work on the paper. All my essays and things that I have them, do they do a beautiful job because we go to the library to get the computers from the lab cart, you know? And I make sure they do their work. And then I sit down with them I usually proof, and I sit down with them. I tell them where the mistakes are, now run that back into the computer and make the corrections, you know? And that's how they have success. You must be successful. You can't depend on society to take care of you. You gotta take care of yourself, you know? You gotta do your part, you do your part and then you ask God to help you.

CD: In your opinion what's the strength/biggest problem that US schools face, public schools?

Ms. Lana: We don't get the support that we need first of all. People feel like educators, they don't realize how much work we do. So some people public officials, first of all the pay, the pay, for one thing they don't realize what impact we're having on this country's future, world's future, a serious impact, a serious impact.

So then they don't really respect teachers like they should. They don't really know, even the school, the school board too, they come in the classrooms, they don't really know what's going on. They speculate that, they don't really know. And I think, the community support is a feature, we need more community support you know? We got this governor he's making everybody sick, and you know you just you just need the support, needs to come from the top. President Obama is trying to do his best, what he can do, he could do more for education, education higher education as well as high school public schools.

CD: How would you describe yourself as a teacher?

Ms. Lana: I was and am a teacher a caring teacher, I'm a confidant. The students tell me so much and they know it's not going to get back anywhere. I would say that I have great expectations for them, for the students and I try to make them believe in themselves, so that they can just be successful and be somebody important. Make them feel important, so that once you feel important and people start saying hmmmmm, she thinks she's important. Okay because you're carrying yourself, you start believing in yourself enough.

Ms. Lana: Now students are realizing hey let's get to college, you have more options in life if you have that college degree, as opposed to somebody who just has a high school diploma. I said you be more marketable. People will say you're a college graduate oh you have a bachelors. And Like I tell my African American students there's no uncle that's going to die and leave you \$1 million to start a business, we don't leave money.

You're gonna have to scuffle for yourself and the more education you have the more options you have. You will have far more options when you have an education. If not, you're gonna be at the bottom of the barrel. Like I tell students in rap session people don't respect you if you're ignorant and you become an adult, they do not respect you. They ignore you.

CD: I'm going to say the name of the students from my study and you can tell me your experiences with any of these students.

CD: Yeltsin

Ms. Lana: Yeah I like him, a lot. He's doing really well for me. He came in summer school, I taught summer school and he was in there and he's just blossoming. And the thing, he never even thought about college, Dr. E he's taking some boys supposed to be taking some boys next Tuesday or Wednesday. And then Yeltsin said if I don't pass this E 20 20 I'm not even going to graduate on time. So I'm gonna tell Dr. E, because I know he is planning on taking Yeltsin and Alan, Imma say Dr. E you need to get to them because they are getting cold feet... Cause college is a big step. For some students, I think they need to go to like a two-year college, get back, just get that confidence built to see what the college atmosphere is all about and then go from there.

CD: Jack

Ms. Lana: Jack is having problems at home, he smokes a lot of weed. He's capable, he was in my ninth grade English class did well for me. And so is capable but, he's got all these extra things in his life that get him, just so he's not focused so much on school. I love him dearly. He's a good kid he's a good kid. Let me tell you what I gave him, I gave him when he was in the ninth grade. I had that Nike shirt you may see him wear. Sometimes he wears it almost every day. That the Nike shirt it's black and it's gray and white. He said you wear some cool men's shirts and I gave it to him. And he just absolutely loves this shirt, absolutely loves it. I like his mother too.

CD: Raynard

Ms. Lana: Just found that his sister's got cancer, did he tell you about that? Yeah and it's been hard on him, he smokes a tremendous amount of weed. I think that is his coping mechanism, but he's able to function pretty well in the classroom. That's what's amazing about him, you know? He'll get his work done now.

CD: He shared with me he doesn't feel anything

That's because he's scared of getting hurt that's what it is. Anything if I don't feel then, just other day there was something about him and his girl that he liked. I just simply told him, let me tell you something, if you like this young lady forgive her, step on with this relationship.

He said I don't feel nothing. I said yes you do, I put my hand on his heart. I got him out my classroom away from his boys and I said this. You can always pay attention to what somebody, tells you, somebody said that. If you really like her, then forgive her and go on. I said you have a good heart though, you can't fool me because, I hear you talk about the nice things you do for your mom and your sister. So you can't fool me.

[Helena, Jocelyn and Martin already mentioned above]

CD: Nina

Ms. Lana: I don't have her. She's a good student though, she gets awards.

CD: Do you feel there are other things you wanted to tell me about the school?

Ms. Lana: It has been a really good place for me to be. I grow with the students, I tell the students all the time, I learn so many things from you guys, you know? I like it a lot because it's a high number of African-American students and they need it. Our kids need it, they need black teachers that they can identify with, and that they care about them. They need that. When they go over to Prescott and they just see one or two or three, four, or five, they don't get to identify. So they're surrounded by white folks all the time. Surrounded, and for African-American students that's not necessarily a good thing.

CD: Thank you so much. I appreciate you letting me interview you.

[She ended by encouraging me and my work as a PhD candidate]

Appendix D

Focus Group Activities and Questions

Focus Group 1

1. What does the word stereotype mean?
2. Stereotype activity: As a group, list (and write down) common stereotypes based on race, class and gender.
3. Please give me examples of stereotypes that you have experienced and/or bias you have experienced or witnessed in schools.

Focus Group 2

1. Activity Sharing: What schools did you come from? Why did you come to AHSDC? What was your first impression of AHSDC?
2. Activity: When I say “AHSDC” to you, what words or phrases would you use to describe this school?
3. What does family mean? A lot people said family?
4. What people are support systems/family here at AHSDC?
5. What are your most memorable moments here at AHSDC?
6. What are your thoughts about rap sessions?
7. What are your impressions of “real life” talk here at AHSDC?
8. What are your post-graduate plans?
9. What are your thoughts on discipline at AHSDC?

Appendix E

Bracketing

"Bracketing typically refers to an investigator's identification of vested interest personal experience, cultural factors, assumptions and hunches that can influence how he/she views the studies data" (Morrissette, 2011, p. 176). Glesne (1999) states that beliefs, prejudices and attitudes must be acknowledged. I desired to offer participants a space, to tell their story in their own words. Having experienced racism and sexism myself, these concepts were a reality. I bracketed the following at the beginning of this study:

1. I hold stereotypical and antagonistic feelings for K-12 academic institutions, because schools are often microcosms of the inequitable societies they are within.
2. Identity such as race, class, gender can negatively or positively affect student outcomes.
3. Alternative schools are another stratified practice of schools to remove poor and students of color from traditional schools and from receiving a quality education.
4. Teachers and practices of school structures can hold blame, not necessarily parents nor students for student failure.
5. In a school of diverse learners, a diverse staff is necessary for student success.
6. Identity and culture must be acknowledged by educators to effectively educate youth of color. (Conchas, 2006; Dunbar, 2001; Harry & Klingner, 2006; Howard, 2010; Kohl, 1994; Noguera, 2008).

Appendix F

AHSDC at a Glance: Information and Practices

1. **Mission statement:** All students will develop the attitude, skill set, and work ethic to immediately become productive, valued citizens.
2. **Creed:** Who I am and what I do here will help create the path of what I will become. Success is not delivered to the lucky but instead to the prepared. I am compromising my future any day that I choose to be unprepared. My future means too much to me for that.
3. **Enrollment:** Students were referred by their traditional school, were expelled, or were persuaded to attend AHSDC in lieu of expulsion. After an application was filed, students who were accepted were required to attend an interview process with their parents/guardians. Most students were accepted, but on a case by case basis some were rejected.
4. **Entrance contracts:** Upon admittance, students and parents/guardians were expected to sign contracts stating their commitment of responsibility at AHSDC.
5. **Rap sessions:** Mandatory bi- weekly meetings for students and staff. These were open and honest discussions about culture, student achievement, and school concerns. Guest speakers came to discuss their life stories, their struggles, and their triumphs.
6. **Staff member's contact information:** All students and parents/guardians were given the cellular phone numbers and email addresses of all staff members to contact with their concerns.
7. **The ten rule:** All absences must be properly documented. With 10 or more unexcused absences, or 15 or more tardies, student enrollment was to be discontinued.
8. **Dress code:** Uniforms were required for all AHSDC students. The uniforms consisted of black dress shoes, black or white socks, black or white collared shirts, a black belt, and black dress pants or non-short skirt (no denim). Honor roll students could dress out of uniform on Fridays. Non-honor roll students could pay \$2 to dress out of uniform. The money collected went toward the end of the year award prizes.
9. **The E – lounge:** This was the name for afterschool detention. Students who were failing one or more classes were required to stay with teachers and were expected to complete late work and homework.
10. **Awards Ceremony:** There were award ceremonies where students on the honor roll with 2.7 or higher GPAs were awarded medals and prizes.
11. **Dual Enrollment:** Some students were enrolled at two schools. AHSDC (morning classes) and their traditional school (afternoon classes).
12. **Trimesters:** AHSDC was on trimesters instead of semesters, which gave students greater opportunities to do well and recover their low GPAs.
13. **Classroom Hours:** There were five block hours per day, with the exception of Fridays. Block classes were 1 hour and 10 minutes in length for intensive class sessions.
14. **Mentorship groups:** Each staff member had a roster of students that they met with to encourage and help track their academic status, individually and collectively. There were

competitions amongst mentorship groups, and prizes were given to group with the highest GPA at the end of the trimester. Mentorship groups met on alternating Wednesday mornings.

- 15. *Friday Enrichment Activities:*** Academic classes were completed in the morning on Fridays. After lunch, community members come to facilitate enrichment classes. Enrichment classes included: chess; theater, sewing, sports, black media critical analysis, dance, leadership training, art, cooking and later the AHSDC Organizing Committee. Staff meetings were held during Friday afternoons.
- 16. *AHOC:*** AHSDC Organizing Committee was the name for the students who stood together to plan and organize with Mr. George (community organizer) and Mr. Clark (History teacher), to keep AHSDC open during the superintendent and school boards attempt to close the school. Students met after school and during the lunch hour.
- 17. *Summer school:*** AHSDC housed its own summer school for over 30 years. Summer school was important as students did not have a break from AHSDC's routine/discipline. Incoming students also were oriented during the summer. AHSDC's summer school brought in revenue from Yellowstone students and offered a free lunch program. After Arcadia's school board and superintendent threatened to close AHSDC, yet were met with community resistance; the school board eliminated AHSDC's summer school in retaliation, under the guise of saving money. AHSDC students had to attend traditional public school summer school. As school began in the fall, students returned in a chaotic behavioral state, having spent a summer without AHDSC.

Appendix G

Gap

Table 9. Arcadia School District's Test Scores/Achievement Gap

ACT Plan Reading	Year 08/09	09/10	10/11	11/12
<i>Caucasian</i>	79.0	74.0	79.0	83.0
<i>African American</i>	43.0	36.0	31.0	32.0
ACT Plan Math	Year 08/09	09/10	10/11	11/12
<i>Caucasian</i>	72.0	72.0	69.0	69.0
<i>African American</i>	21.0	22.0	18.0	12.0

Source: District Research Services May 6, 2012

Appendix H

Staff

Table 10. AHSDC's Non-Participant Staff Members

Name	Position/ Subject Taught	Race	Years in Education	Years at AHSDC	Interesting Information
Ms. Gabriella	Administrative Assistant	African American/Black	22	17	Responsible for organization and order of school.
Ms. Penelope	Teacher's Consultant	Caucasian/White	21	15	Works with students 1:1/attends IEP meetings
Ms. Katie	Teacher's Consultant	Caucasian/White	19	8	Works with students 1:1/attends IEP meetings
Mr. Frank	Tech/econ/government	Caucasian/White	3		Invited Mayor as guest speaker
Ms. Angela	Spanish	Caucasian/White		1	Worked part time
Ms. Donna	Art	Caucasian/White		1	
Grandma	Foster Grandmother	Hispanic/Latina	3		Had case load of female students to assist.
Mr. George	Volunteer Community Organizer	Caucasian/White			Helped students organize to save school
Ms. Shelly	Day Custodian	Caucasian/White	20	6	Granddaughter attended AHSDC

Table 10 (cont'd)

Mr. Vanquez	Afternoon Custodian	Hispanic/Latino	20	20	Mr. Joe supported him through his life. He encouraged students.
Ms. Emajen	Lunch Lady	African American/Black		11	Called AHSDC students “her babies.”
Mr. Joe	Former/Founding Principal	African American/Black	40+	30+	Said he would die for race, family, children
Ms. Swann	Former parent/volunteer	African American/Black			Advocate for new building

Appendix I

Goals for 2011-2012 Academic Year

1. Each student is expected to earn at least a 2.7 GPA each trimester.
2. All student body will maintain less than 300 student absences each trimester.
3. Each student will earn at least 2.5 credits each trimester.
4. A school wide improvement in student-work ethic will be evidenced.
5. Students will complete all class work and homework assignments.
6. Students will develop improved self-worth and self-image.
7. Students will complete all High School Content Expectations.
8. 80% of our students will be proficient or advanced in reading based on Reading Inventory.

Appendix J

Staff Commitments

1. We will maintain high expectations for all students.
2. We will be prepared to teach for the entire academic block.
3. We will develop positive, personal relationships with our students.
4. We will hold all students accountable for their attitude and achievement.
5. We will be transparent, “keep it real,” and be open and honest with students and their families.
6. We will relate all aspects of schooling to the real world.
7. We will never settle for less than the best.

Appendix K

Student's Commitments

1. Each day I walk through the doors, I will be prepared to learn.
2. Each day I will come to the school with a positive attitude and an understanding of the importance of school as it pertains to my future success.
3. Each day I will commit to completing all assigned class work and homework.
4. Each new trimester, I will set 2 goals that can be monitored and assessed through each day, week and month.

Appendix L

Parents' Commitments

1. We will ensure that our child comes to school prepared everyday by 7:30am.
2. We will make certain that our child promptly makes up missed work following absences.
3. We will monitor our child's attendance fully understanding that his or her enrollment is dropped on the 11th absence.
4. We will make doctor appointments and all other appointments around our child's school schedule, which is from 7:30am-2:35pm.
5. We will refrain from planning family vacations or other extended absences that occur on school days.
6. We will inform the school prior to 8am on the day of my child's absence.
7. We will attend the mandatory annual Open House to be updated on goals, achievements and concerns.
8. We will pick up our child's report card from the school during the first and second trimester and plan to meet with our child's teachers to discuss progress made during that particular trimester.
9. We will keep the school staff updated on any concerns or developments occurring within our home we realize that home and school must be connected to maximize our child's success.

Appendix M

Parent and Student Commitment

We read and understand the Parent and Student Commitment. We accept both of them and will honor our individual parts.

I also understand that as a parent/guardian my commitment to the school will consist of:

1. I will make sure my child attends school daily.
2. I will maintain current and active records of my telephone number.
3. I will attend Open House.
4. I will pick up my child's grades twice a year.

We will also hold the staff accountable for the Staff Commitments.

We fully understand that AHSDC is a program and is only as strong as our commitment to adhere to all expectations. Failure to comply with rules and expectations will subject my child to dismissal from this program.

Parent/Guardian's Signature:

Printed Student's Name:

Today's Date:

Appendix N

Grades

Table 11. Student Participants' Grades

	English, American/ African Lit	History Geography	Social Issues	Geometry Algebra1-3	Physics Biology ecology	Tech Art/design Health/PE
Yeltsin	B-	C	Credit	B-	A	C-
Helena	B-	C	Credit	B-	A	C-
Jack	D	C-	Credit	C-	B-	A-
Nina	B+	B	Credit	B+	A	A
Raynard	B	D	Credit	B-	C+	A-
Tonya	A-	D+	Credit	C	B	
Split Students Hamilton High ½ day			Elective		Chemistry	
Martin*			A	B	B	B-
Jocelyn*	B-		Credit	B-	Credit	B-

Table 11 (cont'd).

2nd Trimester

Name/Course	American or African Lit	History Geography	Social Issues	Geometry Algebra1-3	Physics Biology ecology	Tech Art/design Health/PE
Yeltsin	B+	A	Credit	C-	C	B-
Helena	E	E	NC	E	E	C+
Jack	E	E	Credit	C-	C-	C
Nina	A	B	Credit	B+	A	A
Raynard	B	C	Credit	C-	C	B-
Tonya	B+	E	Credit	C	B-	C
Split Students Hamilton High ½ day			Elective		Chemistry	
Martin				C		B
Jocelyn	B-			D+		

Table 11 (cont'd).

3rd Trimester

Name/Course	American or African Lit	History Geography	Social Issues	Geometry Algebra 1-3	Physics Biology ecology	Tech Art/design Health/PE	GPA	Credit recovery
Yeltsin	A	A	Credit	B-	C+	A-	2.914	C-
Helena	C+		Credit	D-	D+	A-/E	1.600	
Jack	E		Credit	B	C	B-/C	1.934	
Nina		B	Credit	B	B-	A/A	3.334	
Raynard**	E	E		E	D+	A-	1.0	
Tonya	C+	C	Credit	C-	D+	A-	2.200	
Split Students Hamilton High ½ day			Elective		Chemistry			
Martin	C		A/A			A-/B+	3.167	
Jocelyn				D	A+		2.122	

Appendix O

Countdown to the Super Bowl

Chapter 3 Test Warm-up

Name: _____ Date: _____ Period: _____

In football, a second drive is when a team scores either a touchdown or field goal. On November 20, 2011, the Green Bay Packers scored 6 times. The number of touchdowns was two more than three times as many field goals. How many touchdowns and field goals did the Packers score on this day? Answer questions below.

- 1) Create a system of equations:

- 2) Solve the system with either elimination or substitution:

- 3) Graph the solution that reveals the answer to your question:

Appendix P

Difference Between High School and College

High School

- Right by law to go to school
- Many test & quizzes
- Extra-credit work allowed
- Allowed to retake or redo work
- Teachers discuss test material
- Instruction modes are varied
- Teacher's reach out to students
- Assignments are structured
- Receive credit for motivation
- Teachers trained to teach
- Student progress is monitored
- Class attendance is mandatory
- Family and faculty available
- Courses last 18 weeks
- Class size often small
- Schools must test and identify disability
- Must develop IEP and monitor
- Right to due process hearing

College

No given right
Fewer tests & quizzes
Not much extra-credit work
Rarely allowed to retake/redo
Rarely discuss test material
Instruction is usually lectures
Students reach out to teacher
Assignments less structured
Grades based on a few tests
Professors are researchers
Students monitor progress
Attendance rarely mandatory
Support system is limited
Classes can last 14 weeks
Class size often large
No identification obligation
Student develops own plan
May file a grievance

Appendix Q

AHSDC

Table 12. Students' Words and Phrases Used to Describe AHSDC

Student	Words/Phrases
Martin	Different because like you really can't get that close to your teachers anywhere. But here I have an outside relationship with my teachers. That's rare
Yeltsin	Success Helpful Hope Family... we talk about stuff at the rap sessions
Jack	Family because we like a family every time we're at like rap session
Nina	Loving Small school Family
Jocelyn	The backbone Family Encouraging yeah they encourage you to the most what you can do
Helena	Tough Family Loving
Tonya	Family because we're like family Caring Loving Stern, they're about their business

Appendix R

School Board Meeting Speeches of Participants

Board Meeting 1

Martin 12th grader (Dr. E stands nearby)

Hello, I want to get straight to the point, without AHSDC I would be dead or in jail. (Pause) Without AHSDC I would be dead or in jail. I said it twice. Once so you can understand how devastating that would be for me to be a statistic. And I said it again for myself, to know that I passed it, because of AHSDC and this man standing next here, right next to me. Sorry had to get that out. But back to the point, since I have a time limit now, and last time I came up here I didn't have a time limit. So a long story short: I witnessed my father get shot at the age of nine. If you read the National Press you will see that I am in the paper for that, and my mom is currently in and out of the jail, and her due date is next month. And I have a brother and three sisters and AHSDC is a family and they took care of me. They kept me under their wing. They pushed me to go to College. Since they pushed me to go to college, I will be attending Wescott University (applause) and also, and also I have a six-year scholarship full ride. So to just to make it clear without AHSDC family, coming from where I didn't have a family, they made me a man. They made me be a person that can take care of my family. And I can take care of other's families because I have the opportunity to go to college to change the world. Thank you (shakes Dr. E's hand and gives him a hug).

Mr. Shaw, science teacher

Good evening board members, administrators, and guests, my name is Mr. Shaw, a teacher for the last 24 – 26 years at AHSDC. We often tell our students, if you do not know your history you repeat the same mistakes. So I thought perhaps a little history was in order. For a brief period of time before AHSDC there was a program named alternative school for disruptive youth (small laughter from audience) which should, I see no humor. Which should give you an idea of its purpose, and what this district thought of the original students who attended it. The students and the staff quickly changed its name to AHSDC in honor of the man who gave his life in a rescue mission to help others. That is what AHSDC is for students. Past, present and future, a rescue mission (applause). AHSDC was established 40 years ago and was designed for the students, you've just heard speak. Though they were not yet born. The new building which was designed with the students in mind, so many of them were just learning to walk or talk or not even born yet. AHSDC was designed to provide structure and discipline, a family atmosphere for students who had not been successful in comprehensive high schools. Students who were lost or forgotten

by this district, by this community. After roughly 25 years of teaching at AHSDC and listening to the administration and fellow colleagues, I believe if anything AHSDC should not be closed, but others should be started to help do what we as a community claim to do, which is to educate ALL of our students (applause), thank you. I have just one brief thing, for you see the dirty little secret is we do not educate all of our children. Some fall through the cracks or are forgotten. Many will challenge me and say that this is not so but then explain to me how it is I have a 9th grader reading at the fourth grade level, and a 12th grader reading at the second grade level. In closing let me just say this: is this district sincere about equality and equity, in closing the achievement gap? Or are these just buzzwords for public consumption? Thank you very much.

Charlae

I'm a social worker, co-founder for a mentorship program and I'm an educator. Superintendent and Board of education members: I ask you to consider the following:

1. Humanize this discussion

In academia, we often put an emphasis on numbers, percentages, funding. Tonight as a concerned educator, I ask you to move away from single numbers and simple numbers and pay attention to the people: (points to students and staff behind) the AHSDC voices that you have heard here tonight.

2. The achievement gap must be based in EQUITY...that discussion

Equity is an action word! The achievement gap will never diminish until the foundation of all these educational needs and decisions are rooted and based in equity. Equity does is not include relocating, consolidating, or eliminating necessary programs for marginalized populations.

3. Policy

In the world of educational policy IF we find programs, schools, teachers, principals, and students that are experiencing success (such as AHSDC) we never discuss eliminations. INSTEAD, we ask ourselves how can we support this program further and REPLICATE these practices (applause).

Please remove this proposal from the table permanently. Thank you

Board Meeting 2

Martin, 12th grader (Dr. E's two sons came and stood at the podium as well)

Good evening Board of Education. AHSDC where it is, is the best location for us as a high school. Students that attend are continually on a track towards being successful. Many of you

don't know that AHSDC students used to meet in one room trailers, where water would drip inside when it rained, and students needed to wear coats during class to stay warm. Individuals such Mr. Joe and Ms. Swann and other community members petitioned, petitioned the school board for 11 years for permission to construct and build our school. This school is a historical landmark. Mr. Joe purposely chose this school away from other schools, distractions to discourage skipping. At AHSDC we have small class sizes that work to our advantage. We have more support as opposed to a class of 30 students. If this building were combined there would be a massive raise in the attendance truancy rates for AHSDC students. You are probably asking the question, why? If we were to get sent to another school and put in the basement we would feel like outsiders. Meaning, we do not belong in the school like something is wrong with us. This is why we need to keep AHSDC where it is. At the traditional schools it's unusual to build personal relationships with teachers. Many kids in this generation do not care about education because they feel most teachers do not care about them. The AHSDC school staff encourages us to attend college and keep us in tune with reality. Moving AHSDC would be a tragedy to students, teachers and parents. There are people around me representing the dedication and love for a program that helps students so they can attend college. And I just wanted to say that I had trouble reading this because I'm kind of upset because this is my family and when your family is being basically..... Gunned down you feel it in your heart. I want to come off the heart so bad. I couldn't even read this right. I took my time to write this. I had help because that's what I get at AHSDC, but I'm kind of shaken up because my family is being gunned down right now and I don't like that. But, I just want to say please keep AHSDC open for everybody.

Jack, 10th grader (Dr. E and Mr. Smith stood near podium)

I have been a part of the AHSDC family for three years. AHSDC has helped me with more than academics. Before I was even born Ms. Barb and her wonderful family opened their home to my aunt when she was in need. I was recently evicted from my house. I thought I was going to be homeless until Mr. Shaw found out and brought it up in a staff meeting. A couple days later Mr. Klein was talking to my mom about moving us into a house he had rented. Without AHSDC I'd be homeless, on the streets wasting my life (sniff). If I were at Prescott, none of my teachers would've even known about this issue, because the size of the classroom and amount of students that they have. With a small school like AHSDC, I was able to develop a relationship with my teachers that saved my family (sniffs). That is why I believe AHSDC should stay exactly how it is. If you respect our voice we request that you vote in front of us.

Ms. Lana, English teacher

Good evening, I'm a mother, a friend, a counselor and a proud teacher many years at AHSDC. (applause). I am humbly asking the school board to keep our school just the way it is. I have no objections with consolidation, but I know that they have their own philosophies for their students

just as we at AHSDC have our own philosophies for our students. I have always thought that Arcadia School District, everybody in Arcadia School District were about equity, quality education, and closing the achievement gap. Least wise, least wise and out of all of the district equity meetings that I have attended that was a proclamation. Dismantling AHSDC as it stands right now would devastate our young students, as well as their futures. Because now we have students who actually care about their GPAs, (applause), who actually are graduating from high school on time, and who actually are matriculating into colleges and universities (applause). Who actually have some hope for their futures. The question tonight is, why would anyone take this away from our students at AHSDC?

Mr. Shaw, science teacher (Dr. E's son standing near podium)

Good evening board members and administrative team and community members. Rumors are flying will AHSDC be closed? Will it be merged with another program? Become a school within a school? Will it be shut down? We in this district pride ourselves making decisions based on data, research, and working together. But I do not see this here. Since last meeting I've been hearing students invite the school board to attend AHSDC and one took them up on their offer... Disappointing. Superintendent has been with this district for approximately one year now and made one appearance... Disappointing.

MEAP scores still show an achievement gap... Damnable

High suspension rates of African American students compared to other ethnic groups... Damnable

High percentages of African Americans diagnosed as special ed, especially in this district... Damnable

Lack of role models at the elementary level for minority students. 81 minority teachers at elementary level including African-American, Asian, Hispanic and Israeli...

Damnable

Particularly for African American males who have no role models, no connections. Have we once again let them down? I have one quote to read to conclude, this is from Lee C Woods: "white female teachers comprise the significant majority of the public's teaching, school teaching force in the United States. At the same time black males are one of the lowest achieving, academic lowest achieving demographics of students. They are placed in special ed, suspended expelled and drop out of high school in higher numbers than their white and Latino counterparts..." It is no different in Arcadia. though we like to think it is. Let me conclude by saying I once again invite the superintendent and all, all board members to come to AHSDC, not to speak but to see it in action. Thank you very much.

Ms. Swan, former parent/staff member

Good evening my name is Ms. Swan and I'm angry. I'm mad at the decision-making of this board and the administration. Why? Because every time you get into a quandary and more money is needed to cover up your erroneous decision-making the non-ending thing that we always hear is let's close AHSDC. I don't think so. Due to the diligence and the painstaking community commitment, AHSDC will prevail. Still we will have, how would you, why would you entertain a thought of closing our small school. When AHSDC is the least drainage in your budget? How about closing and incorporating some of those old antiquated buildings.... (applause). Saddle and Cillside Alternative High schools can be utilized day and night in the same building on the bus line. They can be merged together. there's a good reason for AHSDC to remain open and alone. Our school is not, was not built or structured to inundate another school. I was a single parent of 4 children and 4 graduates. My two youngest attended and graduated on time with the (buzzer rings--- she looks at timekeeper and then continues). With the extended love and commitment of the school. One last thing, I have to throw this in. I have been with AHSDC for almost 30 years and I will fight this board (hits her chest with her hand) to my dying day, okay? By any means necessary. I will be here (applause). I believe the salaries of the administration need to be cut just like everybody else (president interrupts). I feel as though I believe, in my opinion the superintendent \$244,000 is outrageous (cheering). [To audience] Come on. Hold up I got time shhh, I got time. (president interrupts) Obama don't make that much money. I will conclude. Mr. Coltin appears to be doing his job (president interrupts). How can I finish if you keep interrupting me? As I stated Mr. Coltin appears be doing his job and hers too. The script need to be flipped. He should be getting her salary. She (superintendent) needs to go back to the east coast or wherever you came from.

Mr. Joe, former principal

My name is Joe and I have a history with AHSDC. It appears to me the greedy takes from the needy. Historically AHSDC started out as a program within another school. And we were treated as noncitizens of the community. This very much goes on today. The bus drivers would not even take our kids to school. So sharing the building with another school is certainly a bad idea and goes in the line of closing AHSDC. It will be on his deathbed. Many of you do not know AHSDC. I always compared it to Mitt Romney, he doesn't know poor people (laughter). I'm beginning to think that some things happen in this community to poor people. AHSDC has a long history, has had to fight for change all the time. To even consider moving AHSDC with a group of students of a different philosophy, different ideas, and you will be closing an institution. 40 years later we are still fighting. I think it's a social issue and we should look at it as a social issue (applause of hands). It pits us against the system and certainly creeps up on our value system that we know in America (president interrupts time limit). Shifting of school to another school means we've lost rights. This happened to earthworks, they got into community they

closed the school. So I think I want to urge you to please remove from your agenda the idea of moving AHSDC. Many of you have not been to AHSDC and don't know about AHSDC, what the work is about. I could go on and on talking about AHSDC but many of you know. Many of you don't, this is a failure on the part of the school system, if they move AHSDC school and that's one way to do it. Talk to me later after I can give you some more.

Board Meeting 3

Helena, 10th grader

My name is Helena and I'm a part of the AHSDC family. I have been told that I am a bad kid and disrespectful, and felt like I wasn't wanted. But as soon as I came here a lot changed about me. I didn't use to want to go to college or even finish high school. I don't have any interest in attending Prescott, Hamilton, Statue, or Yellowstone [High] at this moment. When I attended Yellowstone High I missed 100 days out of 180 days of school. At AHSDC I don't have a chance for skipping because of the area and the stable place we are at. I'm not ready to go back to my comprehensive high school at this moment. My family at AHSDC has imprinted in my mind I am Helena and I will be someone.

Ms. Lana, English teacher

Good evening my name is Ms. Lana and I am a proud veteran teacher at AHSDC. At AHSDC we have a philosophy: we are family. So tonight, you're going to hear some of us echoing what each other say, because family tend to stick together on certain issues. I have some concerns tonight. I would like to know why at the May 9th board meeting a young white girl got to speak about her school experiences, at her school. She also read a letter to the board from her fellow classmates. She talked a long while and there was no time limit to tell her to stop. After she was finished, the board members congratulated her. I know because I watched on television and you made her feel very special. Yet our students at AHSDC have told compelling stories as well. Many have only talked for a minute and a half and have not received the praises like this young white girl received. So I'm going to ask you this question is this fair? No it isn't. Should our school ever be consolidated or eventually dismantled? And I say no it should not be. Should we have our own summer school? Definitely yes. I am an African American female and have experienced many forms of racism, and I'm going to tell the board right now that I feel racism. And I demand that this feeling of racism that is going on right now, be dissipated. Thank you.

Ms. Karla, counselor liaison

Good evening My name is Karla and I am a graduate of Arcadia Public Schools, and a 30 year employee at AHSDC. We appreciate that AHSDC is being taken off the cutting board, however, our students are passionate about their school and want their voices to be heard in this public Democratic forum. Please listen with an open heart to their testimonials. I have been appalled at

how parents, students and teachers have been received during public commentary over the last month. We have been allotted 90 seconds to plead our case, tell our stories. Our founding principal devoted 36 years of his life to this community, yet his voice was not heard. His comments were cut short. Where is his honor or recognition? The superintendent got up to talk to an administrator, trustees are having sidebars with their neighbor, or surfing their cell phones, while the board president is rudely cutting us off once our time has expired. We teach our students to show respect while others are talking, sharing, yet our school officials do not model this behavior. Public commentary is the only public forum available to us at this time. We were not given unlimited time to share our stories that the other students were given two weeks ago. Our students did not receive accolades for their progress and their achievements. How do our parents and students get a voice at your table? If you are truly concerned about the time and the length of your meeting, you would cut much of the drivel and your personal testimonies when you speak. Try limiting your comments to 90 seconds each, as we have been having to do. You like to hear yourself talk, but you don't listen to your constituents. Thank you for your time tonight and for listening to our voices.

Mr. Smith, science teacher (wearing AHSDC visor)

Good evening staff. Good evening board and administrators. Unlike most everyone who spoke I want to thank you for having this proposed to be closed. For two reasons, I've never been more proud of my students and my colleagues than I have been this last month. You brought us together in a way that nothing else could've done. Thank you. I hope you do it again next year (laughter). Four weeks ago when I spoke to you I mentioned the dirty little secret, do we want to educate all the students in this district? Two weeks ago I asked, I said some of the statistics among the African-Americans was damnable and I was told later, some people did not like the use of the word damnable. As my mother would say I don't give a reservoir. (Laughter). One week ago you discussed AHSDC's test scores and the need to research and make better use of test scores. I couldn't agree with you more. Let's look at test scores, but why just AHSDCs? Are we serving all the students in this district or as I asked earlier are we serving just some, and using the buzzwords for public consumption? So yes you addressed our test scores they are abominable they are damnable. But here's the average for the three comprehensive high schools in the district that to my knowledge, you did not address that have been mentioned by other speakers. District wide for the ACT: Caucasian 80%, African-Americans 33%. District wide for math in ACT: Caucasians 65%, African-Americans 9%. Taken in the 11th grade district wide reading: Caucasian 88% , African-Americans 53%. Math: 86% for Caucasian 43% for African-Americans. Yes use the data (takes his paper in his hand and shakes it) but use it on everyone (pounds his fist on podium) and address the question I've asked. When will we begin to serve every student in this district? Thank you for your time.

Charlae

Thank you to those board members who exhibited an understanding and voted yes to take AHSDC and its consolidation and closing off the table. Now our concern shifts to the future of AHSDC students, their families and our inclusion in future decisions.

When I teach my TE course at the University for students who want to be educators, I emphasize the following points when focusing on closing the achievement gap:

1. *The big picture:* The institution must be examined...in this case Arcadia Public School district and their traditional schools. Highlighting one school AHSDC and their test scores is not only unfair, but it's misleading and deceiving. Test scores as the district continue to show massive gaps at EVERY school.
2. *Get to the root of the problem:* The academic achievement gap has multiple indicators. This discussion cannot be limited solely to low test scores. As a district, institutional inequities such as disciplinary practices, teaching practices, tracking, special education placements, and teacher/counselor expectations play a defining role in this gap and need to be examined.
3. *Data for this gap:* There is great debate in the Academy regarding the value of qualitative data versus quantitative data. Please do not discount these students (points to students behind), nor their parents, nor their voices as mere testimonials. Their words hold rich qualitative data of their experiences in traditional schools that have excluded them and the excellent practices at AHSDC that are helping them achieve success. And just so you know, test scores are not the only indicator of achievement or success.

If equity is your goal, then please educate yourselves in this area before making irrational or hasty proposals that will definitely lead to widening the achievement gap. The decisions are made on your watch. So please keep this proposal off the table and work with parents, teachers, and students for nothing less than an equitable outcome. Thank you

Board Meeting 4

Ms. Brenda, community liaison

Good evening Board of Education. How do we citizens hold the school board accountable for the fiasco that is going on in this district? How do we hold you accountable as erroneous information given to the school board disrupts the lives and education of the most fragile population, their parents and the staff? As I've stated before you have allowed those with no invested interest in this community to come in and make you appear incompetent. Where is your loyalty, as we citizens get out to make sure that these bonds get past? Where is the commitment to the

community that elected you in? Where is your accountability where you put the test scores of AHSDC students up for scrutiny as if the entire district is not responsible for this? Have you asked yourself why it seems to be a mass exodus from central administration? Why are good principals and teachers running from a district that at one time was ranked sixth in the nation for education and now is just a strongly noted for its achievement gap? Again, I ask, is the board so disconnected from this community? Not aware of what's going on or is there some other agenda or political aspiration that us taxpayers should know about? As a tax-paying citizen, I am appalled at the action, lies, and deceit exhibited by Central Administration, and supported by the school board. The arrogance displayed here is deplorable and a slap in the face for those people in the community truly concerned about the direction the district is going. Along with our taxpayers dollars for education. What do we do? I don't know what to do except say we have to get those who are not concerned about education for all students out of here. Now I'm going to go back to the last board meeting. Mr. Caplin indicated at the last school board meeting that not having summer school at AHSDC would save \$80,000, okay (pounds hands-on podium), let's talk about that. He said it would be no need for AHSDC staff as Prescott High would absorb all of our students. As of today AHSDC staff, work was hired for teachers. So, let's think about this now, you was only going to have to pay 120 hours, if we were going to have summer school at AHSDC. Now you have to pay 150 hours. Still got to provide transportation for bus tokens or school buses, and you are in jeopardy of losing revenue. Which I still have not seen reflected in the school budget plan. I never see the money that has come in from Yellowstone High. Even though I know it's a partnership we've gotten over \$150,000 for this district through that partnership. I want to know, what are we to do as taxpayers. I get out into the community. I see you out in the community, and I want to say thank you for coming to the African American Festival. We are happy that you came we appreciate it. But don't show up for the fun stuff and not come to the table and talk about real issues (tapping hand on the podium). Don't do that to us, that's a slap in the face. Okay, that's okay. I want to say good night everyone. Thank you for listening and please let's get this district on the right track. It's a downward spiral that is out of control. You are losing the best that you have and it seems like we're supporting personal agendas. Thank you so much.

Ms. Karla, counselor liaison

Good evening. My name is Karla. Along with being a graduate of Prescott School I am the parent of three graduates two from Cillside High and one from Hamilton High by way of AHSDC. Once again, I wanted to take the opportunity to thank you for taking AHSDC off the list of cuts for this upcoming school year. Also I want to clear up some misconceptions regarding our program. Earlier it was stated that there had never been an evaluation of our program in 40 years. This is absolutely not true. Do you honestly believe that Arcadia Public Schools would've spent \$1.3 million on a brand-new building back in 1994 if they did not believe that we were getting results? Our program was put through a rigorous evaluation under the direction of then

superintendent [name]. This included every student taking a pre-and post-computerized adaptive testing developed by the NEAW that other parents had talked to the board about. This test evaluated language, reading and math. Teacher's parents and students were key in identifying our strengths and weaknesses. Administrators also involved in this process were [names]. Our program was deemed exemplary and administration and school board chose to expand our capacity to open it up to more students. Alternative sites were looked at to house our program including Frost, Saddle High, and a commercial building in Abbot farms. Saddle High's location and design were not deemed suitable for our program. Nothing has changed in the past 18 years to refute this. Consequently, the administration proposed building a new facility at our current site and our school board concurred. AHSDC staff were very involved with the design of our building. The office has a direct view down each hallway. The library is centrally located, classrooms are very small to accommodate no more than 15 students in the class. On paper we are capable to hold 200 students. We have never been given the staff to accommodate this many. In fact, our FTE have been cut significantly in recent years. The most students at one time was about 135. Academically we offer classes required for graduation. Students demonstrate mastery of the SEED test, the same as students in a comprehensive high school. Our trimesters schedule allows teachers more time to cover material in the time permitted. It bothers me deeply that board members do not look at a student's GPA to measure the success of our program. Are using grades don't matter or only AHSDC grades don't matter? Now the fact is our new superintendent wishes to tear us away from a facility that we designed specifically for students needs and to dismantle a program that has been successful for 38 years. She seems to know what is best for AHSDC's population, than we who have been educating our students and their families for so long. The Superintendent has been our building twice, the second time just last week. It is only recently after AHSDC was put on the chopping block that administrators have been meeting with Dr. E to tell them their version, their vision for the future of our program. They have not asked for any input on our version in the future of our school. This year's cuts are made to our afternoon bussing saved the district over 100,000 dollars. There also has been no credit given to our program for, I thought it was \$89,000 that we brought to public schools from Yellowstone public schools, but Ms. Brenda is saying is \$150,000. It is also been suggested to me that AHSDC get its cost per pupil in line with other high schools including Cillside High. This is an unreasonable request due to nature of our program our program is designed for small class for a reason. If you want to put 30+ academically at-risk in one class, you might as well leave them at their home school. Cillside High's population fit fairly self-motivated and not what one would consider at risk. They can easily accommodate 30 students in the class and most successfully. Those who are not successful will eventually be weeded out. It is been good to hear that AHSDC has been given a reprieve while this administration evaluates our program this fall. My concern is it may be too little, too late. You have alienated a highly educated principal's whose dissertation for his doctorate was ironically based on best practices for closing the achievement gap. He has brought a lot of great ideas and energy to our program, however, the direction

central administration wants to take us in is very discouraging. And frankly, he and our teachers want no part of it. Thank you for your time.

Charlae

I sat and cringed at the last board meeting when the uninformed picture painted was that AHSDC's summer school was simply an orientation program. This was not only false but also misleading.

Thus, AHSDC's summer program, which is 110% academically rigorous, and helps to diminish what scholars identify as the Summer Setback as well as the achievement gap has been eliminated. As an educator, I do not understand that logic. Especially since AHSDC's summer school program brought in money to Arcadia School district through its Yellowstone Students. This fact was not mentioned in the budget report.

So let us break this down: students who WE have been saying are not ready to attend or feel uncomfortable at the comprehensive high school are forced to attend Prescott's summer school or NOT go to summer school at all. For our students this was a lose –lose situation.

In the Teacher Education 250 course that I teach for undergraduate students...Freire's "Pedagogy of The Oppressed" is always included on my syllabus as reading material for Day 2. Just as issues of power and oppression affect our society they seep into our schools as well.

"Freire (1993) states that educators can unknowingly hold oppressive power over their students (and parents) by incorporating practices that are discriminatory and silencing. Additionally, Dr. Lisa Delpit (1998) writes that there is a silenced and in turn an oppressive dialogue that happens far too often among educators. This dynamic often takes place when knowledge is not enlisted, shared or allowed from other individuals."

To those who this applies we want you to understand----- issues of Power, oppression, intimidation and professional bullying have NO place in: Arcadia Public Schools; the school board; or the superintendent's cabinet.

Stop trying to push your own agenda this is NOT about you, you received your education that is why you are sitting where you are now. AHSDC IS the only place that these youth have experienced success and are attending colleges and universities. The children at AHSDC have the potential to be the future doctors, lawyers, teachers, social workers, nurses etc... This can continue to happen if Arcadia stops allowing inequitable decisions to be made to our most vulnerable populations.

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