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Abstract Attitudes and Concrete Realities: College Attitudes and Preparedness of
Memphis City School Students

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ABSTRACT

Despite high aspirations toward college, low-income, minority students are often unlikely to pursue and/or complete college. Various factors affect students' college planning and enrollment, including academic readiness, teacher influences, and family variables, but how exactly do these elements affect students in Memphis City Schools (MCS)? This study assessed MCS eighth graders' college readiness and retrospectively examined MCS high school graduates' attitudes and beliefs about college enrollment and their preparation for college. Analysis of eighth grade students' performance on the EXPLORE test (ACT, 2006) showed these MCS students, as a whole, are not meeting college readiness benchmarks in English, reading, math, and science, though they plan to attend college. African American and Hispanic/Latino students' scored lower than their Caucasian and Asian American peers. Race/ethnicity by mother's education level interactions were found; African American and Hispanic/Latino students whose mothers had a bachelor's degree or higher scored significantly lower than their Caucasian and Asian American peers whose mothers also had a college degree. Additionally, MCS graduates currently enrolled in college completed a survey reporting their high school experiences and current levels of college performance. These graduates remembered positive college attitudes among their peers and felt somewhat prepared for college, but were unhappy with their high school's student body/environment and needed more college counseling, as well as help with the application process and financial aid.

Introduction

In the spring of 2007, the Memphis City School Board of Education voted to adopt “Every Child, Every Day, College Bound” as the Memphis City School (MCS) district’s official motto. However, this decision was not made without serious scrutiny from board members and the community at large. Their concerns were due to the school district’s history of low graduation rates and underperforming schools. While the new motto was intended to provide a “clearly articulated vision” to the people of Memphis and to reestablish the high educational expectations necessary to motivate students, it was a tall order for the struggling school district (MCS Board of Education, 3-5-07).

It is admirable to note that the MCS School Board members refuse to accept failure as the norm or to abandon their mission to raise the performance standards of their schools. It is also essential to realize that MCS is certainly not alone in their struggles. Inner city schools across the country have struggled to meet state and federal benchmarks. Further, students from racial-ethnic minority groups face many risk factors and barriers to successful educational achievement. In other words, Memphis’ story is not unique; rather, the data gathered and discussed here is applicable to many locations, school districts, and groups. Through the collection and analysis of qualitative and quantitative data, I hope to pinpoint MCS eighth grade students’ current level of academic readiness for college and to collect information from past MCS students who are now enrolled in college and whose perspectives may shed light on current readiness levels and what schools might do to improve student performance.

History of Memphis' Educational System¹

To fully understand the Memphis City School system, it is imperative to recognize its history and the role it has played in the city's development. Memphis was officially chartered in 1826, but it wasn't until 1848 that it was able to create its own public education system. Before this time, children were taught in the home or in private academies, a trend that continued for affluent Memphians even after public education was available. In 1852, an advisory board called the "Board of Visitors" was established to help manage the daily operations of the schools. It gained administrative power over the school system, eventually securing the right to select school personnel, develop school policies, create a universal curriculum with proficiency tests, and oversee the budget. After the Civil War, it became apparent a new charter was needed in order to solve postwar problems faced by the schools. The charter of 1869 was passed, which most notably changed the name of the board to the Board of Education and more significantly, allowed African-American students to get an education.

Not only did the end of the Civil War attempt to award African-American children in Memphis the right to receive an equal education, it also served as the catalyst for the current African-American majority that characterizes the city today. After falling early in the war, Memphis became the location of a large Freedman's Bureau, responsible for aiding ex-slaves and their families. The influx of freed slaves, as well as African-American bureaucrats and soldiers, eventually led to a vast majority of them settling here, causing African-Americans to make up 13 percent of the population in 1860, and 38 percent by 1870. Unfortunately, it would be many years before these African American

¹ The information in this section was taken from Pohlmann, 2008, *Opportunity Lost: Race and Poverty in the Memphis City Schools*.

citizens received the educational rights they were promised. In fact, the Board of Education altogether ignored the federal mandate to educate African-Americans until 1867 when the state intervened. Even then, the school board made little effort to improve conditions for minority students. In addition, whatever progress was being made to achieve “separate, but equal” quickly dissipated with the arrival of the yellow fever epidemic in 1873. For close to a decade, Memphis suffered from this epidemic, barely functioning as a city and eventually losing its charter in 1879. The city eventually recovered from the epidemic, regaining its charter in 1893, as well as an even larger majority of African-American residents.

While the Memphis Board of Education urged black teachers and principals to manage and maintain the black schools at which they worked, the Board could not avoid building two new black schools between 1869 and 1890. African-American students were attending school at roughly the same rate as whites by the 20th century for several reasons: the state implementation of compulsory attendance, the population adjustments caused by the yellow fever epidemic, and a general increase in the wealth of some African-American families. The Memphis City Schools, as they had come to be referred to, had survived a turbulent start. By the time desegregation arrived in Memphis, more than 100,000 black and white students were enrolled in the Memphis City School district, a testament to the commitment of many teachers and administrators. However, the 1954 Brown versus Board of Education decision that “separate but equal” was *not equal* would soon rock the city again, raising racial tension and discrimination to an all time high.

Initially, the Memphis City Board of Education responded to the call to desegregate the schools by claiming their schools were still racially divided purely as a

result of “residential patterns” (Pohlmann, 2008, p. 65). By 1971, Memphis schools remained segregated despite the proposals of African-American community members and the NAACP, but that would soon change due to court-ordered busing, which mandated that a few black students be bused to majority white schools and a few white students be bused to majority black schools. The busing plan failed miserably in Memphis City Schools, largely because the whites refused to allow it. Instead, white parents moved to the suburbs to place their children in the predominantly white schools, a phenomenon labeled “white flight”. For the white families that stayed in the Memphis city limits, they typically chose to send their children to a private or parochial school. Before desegregation began in the 1960s, Memphis City Schools had a definitive white majority. During that decade, African-Americans increased significantly in number, but it wasn't until 1971 and court-ordered busing that more than half of the white students (almost 40,000) transferred out of MCS. The demographic changes that busing caused in the Memphis City Schools in the 1970s is evident still today with the average school being 85 percent or more African-American.

Memphis Demographics

While the birth and development of the Memphis City Schools was burdened with war, disease, and deep racial issues, this school district is the largest in Tennessee and the 23rd largest in the nation. In 2008, the Memphis City Schools enrolled approximately 105,000 K-12 students and employed more than 6,000 full-time teachers. The demographics of MCS are reported as 86% African American, 8% White, and 6% other races/nationalities (MCS Quick Facts, 2008). When compared to data from the U.S. Census Bureau, these race percentages are higher than those of the general population

and those of all children in Memphis. The 2006-2008 American Community Survey (ACS) approximates that 62.6% of the Memphis population is African-American and 31.7% is White. Furthermore, 71.9% of Memphis children under the age of 18 are African American, 20.6% are White, and 7.5% other races (ACS Children Characteristics, 2008). Due to the large discrepancy between the percentage of white children in Memphis and the percentage enrolled in MCS, it can be assumed that most of these students are attending private or religious schools in the Memphis area. The ACS estimates that 88% of K-12 children are enrolled in a public school and the remaining 12% are enrolled in a private school (ACS School Enrollment, 2008).

To understand the current population of Memphis, it is essential to consider the number of residents living in poverty. It is estimated that 19.5% of Memphis families fall below the poverty level. This is almost 10% higher than the national level. Additionally, of all families with children under the age of 18 in Memphis, 29.8% of them fall under the poverty level. In addition, an estimated one-third of families in poverty have a female head-of-household. According to the ACS, 44.5% of Memphis children live in households that receive public assistance and 37.4% live in households that have had incomes below the poverty level over the past year. When limited to families with only a female as the head of the household, those percentages rise to 62.95 and 55.5%, respectively. Even when the single female householder had worked full-time for the past year, there were still 14.4% female householder families under the poverty level.

The statistics on poverty in Memphis get even bleaker when race becomes a factor. Slightly more than one quarter of all Black families, both married and single parent homes, live below the poverty level, whereas only 6.1% of all White families in

Memphis live in poverty. Married-couple families of both races are more likely to live above the poverty level, but African American couples (6.4%) are still twice as likely as White couples (3.1%) to live in poverty. Overcoming poverty, especially as an African-American child in Memphis, requires motivation, confidence, and above all, a strong education. Unfortunately, this is another area where Memphis continues to struggle as shown by the educational statistics from the U.S. Census Bureau and the TN Department of Education.

In 2008, the Census Bureau published estimated education levels for Memphis residents 25 years and older, reporting the following:

- 6.5% had less than a 9th grade education;
- 12.7% had less than a 12th grade education;
- 80.9 % had a high school diploma/GED or higher;
- 22.2% had a bachelor's degree or higher.

It is no surprise that 34.1% of those 25 or older without a HS diploma live in poverty. Roughly 20% of Memphians with a high school diploma or GED and 12% of those with some college education also live in poverty. Individuals with bachelor's degrees and above represent only 9% of those in poverty.

Memphis citizens of typical college age or who have recently graduated (ages 18-24), attained the following education levels:

- 22.4% had less than a 12th grade education;
- 34.4% had a HS diploma or GED;
- 35% had some college;
- 8.2% had a bachelor's degree or higher.

Further, according to the 2009 Tennessee MCS Report Card, the average 4-year graduation rate is 62.1%, a decrease of almost 5% from 2008. In other words, almost 38% of MCS students do not graduate within a four-year period; however, many of those students earn their high school diplomas or GEDs. In the long run, then, only the 22.4% reported above have less than a high school education. The Report Card also states that 85.8% of MCS students are from low-income families, which might directly hinder their success rate.

Lee and Burkam (2002) found that children from low-SES families begin school at a much lower cognitive levels than their higher-SES peers. Race, ethnicity, and family educational expectations do not affect the school readiness of children near as much as coming from an impoverished background. Additionally, disadvantaged children often attend schools that struggle to maintain resources, smaller class sizes, and more qualified teachers despite system-wide improvements in these areas (Pohlmann, 2008). Therefore, low-SES students in Memphis face many obstacles as they move toward high school graduation. Nonetheless, the majority of MCS students still plan to attend college.

Research Background

About the same time the MCS Board of Education adopted their new motto, Dr. Janet Panter, Dr. Marsha Walton, and three senior psychology majors from Rhodes College were conducting a Participatory Action Research (PAR) study to assess the college attitudes and perceptions of middle school students in one MCS school (Etz, Figari, & Linden, 2007). They found over 90% of the seventh and eighth grade students surveyed believed they would attend college, largely at the behest of their parents' and teachers. It is interesting to note, though, that many of the students believed their friends

might not attend college or even graduate high school. Not only did they reveal higher expectations for themselves than for their friends, they indicated an awareness of the obstacles faced by students in their community and school system at large (Etz, Figari, & Linden, 2007). As noted above, though, actual graduation and college enrollment rates do not match the optimistic intentions of these middle school students. One of the goals of this research project is to identify possible reasons for the discrepancy between positive college aspirations and low college attendance for the majority of Memphis City School students.

Theoretical Framework: Hossler & Gallagher, 1987

There are many factors and influences that affect a student's college selection process. Hossler and Gallagher (1987) were the first to truly harness the influential variables, both individual and organizational, that lead to certain student outcomes, forming the basis of a traditional college choice model. They break the process down into three stages: predisposition, search, and choice. The decisions made at each point in the model ultimately impact students' likelihood to attend college, as well as the type of college to which they will apply and in which they will eventually enroll. What separated Hossler and Gallagher's model from previous ones and made it the primary college choice model was its ability to account for the characteristics of the students and the educational organizations involved (secondary and higher). By addressing the ways in which the interactions between the two affect college choice, researchers can begin to understand why some students go to college and some do not.

The first stage, predisposition, determines whether an individual will attend college or choose another option after graduation. It is at this point that the student's

background (SES, family, peers, academic ability) and high school experience (college preparation, activities, achievement) merge to prompt the student's post graduation plans. This first stage culminates in a decision. Once the decision to attend college is made, students enter the search phase, during which they will "gather information about institutions of higher education" (Hossler & Gallagher, 1987, p. 209) to identify schools that match their personalities and values. Colleges and universities to which they wish to apply are then placed on "the choice list" (p. 209). During the choice stage, students determine the institution they will ultimately attend, based on their choice set and often, the extent to which they feel a college wants them. The current study will focus predominantly on the predisposition phase, because it is the phase with which many MCS students seem to struggle.

A full understanding of the predisposition phase of Hossler and Gallagher's (1987) college choice model provides an initial framework for the present research. Figure 1 illustrates the proposed connections between students' characteristics and their inclination to attend college. Predisposition toward attendance is shown to be the result of school/college characteristics', significant others', and educational activities' influence on student characteristics.

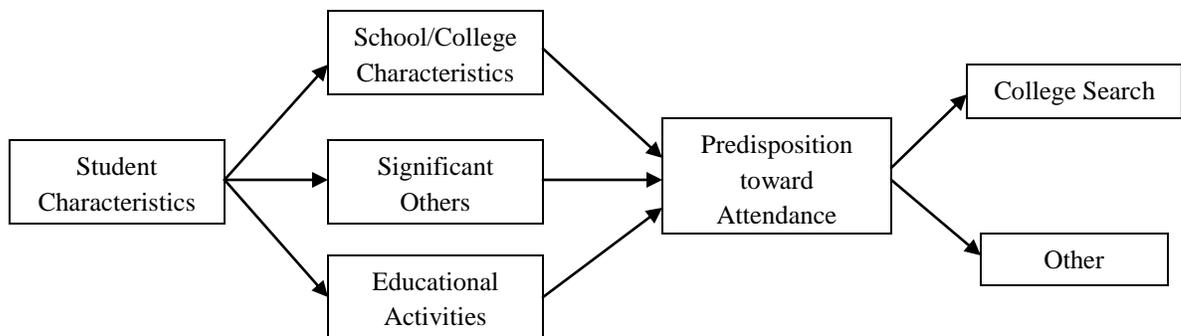


Figure 1. Phase One: Predisposition (Hossler & Gallagher, 1987)

Student characteristics are the foundation of this model and broadly refer to items such as SES and academic ability. However, student characteristics alone do not equal college attendance; rather, they are filtered through and therefore, influenced by certain school/college characteristics, significant others, and educational activities. According to Hossler and Gallagher (1987), considerable research supports the importance of these three categories. “School/college characteristics” shown to promote college attendance are high schools that have high quality curricula and/or more math, science, and college prep classes. They cite Anderson, Bowman, and Tinto’s finding that living near a college campus increases the likelihood of enrolling in college (but not always in the one students live close to), as well as living in an urban or suburban area. “Educational activities” encompass extracurricular involvement, leadership positions, and artistic or athletic accomplishments. The role of “significant others” in this model has probably garnered the most attention. How students perceive their parents’ and peers’ attitudes toward college attendance can greatly impact their decision. Research has shown that the more parents encourage their children to continue their education after high school, the more likely the children are to not only attend college, but attend selective, 4 year institutions (Conklin & Dailey, 1981). Not surprisingly, students whose peers intend to go to college also plan to go to college (Tillery, 1973). Hossler and Gallagher state that all these factors influence the college choice process in some way, but unfortunately, there is still much to be understood before true causation can be established. While this model provided the first step in figuring out how and where students decide to go to college, it did not account for variables, such as culture, race, SES, and gender that have come to play such a large role in educational attainment. Approximately thirty years later, Freeman (2005)

attempted to address some of these issues, particularly African American students and college choice.

Theoretical Framework: Freeman, 2005

Freeman (2005) reexamined the predisposition phase of Hossler and Gallagher's (1987) college choice model in order to better understand the disparity between African American students' high aspirations and low attendance rates. She directly addressed the fact that African American culture does not fit into traditional college choice theories and models. Based on previous research, her own findings, and the input of African American students themselves, Freeman expanded Hossler and Gallagher's predisposition phase in several ways to incorporate culture (See Figure 2). Specifically, she moved the subcategories of "Family and Kinship" and "School Characteristics", so they funnel through "Student Cultural Characteristics" and result in "College Predetermination". Changing the name of the phase from predisposition to predetermination represents recognition that the decision to attend college is often determined by "environmental circumstances" that the student is unable to overcome (Freeman, 2005, pg. 111). Predetermination also explains why "Family and Kinship" and "School Characteristics" are placed before "Student Cultural Characteristics". These two factors influence the culture the student is surrounded by and it is imperative that they work together to ensure the student has the information and support necessary to decide and then, attend college (Freeman, 2005).

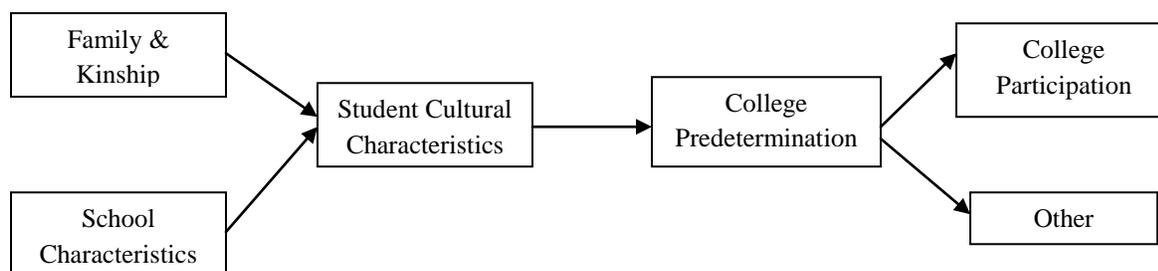


Figure 2. Expanded Phase One: Model of Predetermination (Freeman, 2005)

Factors that Influence College Predisposition and Attendance

While Hossler and Gallagher (1987) and Freeman (2005) provide two theoretical frameworks for this study, it is necessary to also explore the individual factors most commonly used to explain college predisposition and attendance. These factors include the influence of parents/family, economic expectations, peers, and various school features on the college attitudes, preparedness, and attendance rates of students from low SES communities and/or racial/ethnic minority groups.

Family/Parents

The family and specifically, the parents, play one of the largest roles in a child's life when it comes to education. The parents' educational attainment, expectations for their child's education, behavior, and socioeconomic status interweave to form a portion of the child's cultural capital. Cultural capital results from an individual's social class and, depending on that class, supplies an individual with the necessary resources to get ahead in life, if he/she choose to use them (Lareau, 1989). While African American families and communities have placed historically a heavy emphasis on education, there seems to be a disconnect in the process of college choice, which might be explained by a lack of cultural capital (Freeman, 2005). Because cultural capital is based on social class, the parents' education and income are key factors in its determination. Level of education and income are positively correlated; therefore, parents with higher levels of education

increase opportunities for themselves and their children. Freeman states that most African American students have families that encourage them to pursue higher education. Much of this support is due to the parents' desires for their children to surpass their levels. However, children of parents who did not attend college could be disadvantaged significantly during the college choice process (2005). Lacking information about financial aid, applications, costs of living, and academic expectations, parents and students are often forced to decipher the process as they go, especially if the student's school is ill equipped to help. According to Hamrick and Stage, "having at least one college-educated parent directly affected students' predisposition to college" in low-income White, African American, and Hispanic populations (2004, p. 158). In addition to providing experience in the college choice process, parents who have attended college tend to instill an educational expectation of attending college in their child automatically (Freeman, 2005). However, the educational expectations of parents who were not able to attend college, particularly African Americans, are just as influential on a student's decision to pursue higher education, illustrating the way parental attitude directly impacts the child's attitude (Hamrick & Stage, 2004).

Previous research shows that parents who possess positive attitudes and high expectations toward their child's educational attainment increase their child's predisposition to college. Unfortunately, these factors do not occur often enough to increase cultural capital to a level that will allow low-SES, minority students to transition successfully into college. Crosnoe, Mistry, and Elder, Jr. actually found that low-SES parents have more negative views towards their children's probability of attending college (2002). While these parents may hope that their children will go to college, the

financial challenges may become overwhelming and intimidating, making it difficult to provide their children with the emotional and financial support they need, to start the process. Conversely, the authors also found that even with economic disadvantages, parents who stay involved in their children's future education and "believed they could make a difference" in it are better able to keep their child on track (Crosnoe, Mistry, & Elder, Jr., 2002, pg. 700).

The expectations a child perceives often drives their need to succeed and the educational outcomes that result. This could play a very important part in explaining the role of parents, as well as teachers and counselors, on college choice. Most students need clear guidance on what is expected of them starting at an early age to ensure they never lose sight of their educational goals. Attinasi (1989) found that Hispanic students felt like they were defined as future college-goers by direct interaction with parents and high school teachers; these significant others, with the addition of siblings, instill college attendance expectations by communicating and modeling consistently college-going behavior. Unfortunately, even the most determined and encouraging parent can not affect completely their child's college attitudes and decision to attend. In fact, while parents and family might communicate the importance of going to college, unless the student can see the clear financial and social benefits of doing so, the parents' messages might go unheard.

Elaborating on Ogbu (1978), Mickelson (1990) believes that the perceived "practices that do not permit members of castelike minorities (such as blacks) to compete freely for the jobs for which they are qualified", also known as a "job ceiling", trickles down to affect the value minority children place on higher education (pg. 45). Students

from minority and low-SES backgrounds often recognize that their parents or relatives who did go to college are unable to attain the job they want or receive inequitable wages in the job they have. Seeing negative outcomes of adults who did pursue higher education contributes to a student's decision to enroll in college. Due to the job ceiling, they are unable to be sure that the benefits of going to college will outweigh the costs, which can get very expensive and emotionally draining. Research shows that African Americans, especially those who are the first in their family to attend college, accept a lower return on their investment than Whites in the long run (Freeman, 1997). Therefore, disadvantaged students must make a tough decision when faced with the realities of how much it costs to attend college and how much they can expect to make once they graduate, if they are able to. Many are not confident enough in themselves or their academic ability to take the economic risks.

Economic Costs

Interestingly though, those who do believe their future earnings after graduation are worth the risk often possess economic goals that are based on wealth and comfort rather than a specific career. This feeling was documented in a study done by Barnes (1992) on senior African American males. She found that 43.7% of them wanted to become wealthy versus holding a certain occupation. It might be possible that their lack of a definite career goal decreases their aspirations toward higher education when high school graduation nears or as college begins to get tough. Although, the fear of facing limitations in the job market might also prevent these students from truly acknowledging their occupational goals (Freeman 2005). So while the economics of college choice are another key factor in low-SES, minority students' college attendance, many might

wonder why these students do not pursue the financial aid offered by the government and the colleges. Financial aid typically takes the form of subsidized loans and/or grants/scholarships. Jackson (1990) found that obtaining financial aid had a stronger positive effect on the probability of enrolling in college for Black and Hispanic prospective students in 1980 than for their White peers. However, many researchers have discovered that the offer of loans does not affect or could even decrease minority students' decision to attend college (Jackson, 1990; St. John, 1991). The adverse relationship between loans and college attendance is explained by Perna (2000) as possibly resulting from "inadequate knowledge about the availability of financial aid, an aversion or distaste for borrowing, and/or an expectation that future earnings will be insufficient to repay the loans" (p. 137). Therefore, even when low-income students are offered loans as a part of their financial aid package, they recognize the implications that come with borrowing money and are less likely to continue the college choice process.

Thus, the unfortunate barriers to college attendance for low-income, minority students begin to tangle. Students born into low-SES, minority backgrounds often have parents who do not have a college education. This can make it difficult for the parents to financially support their family, let alone ensure their children are doing well in school and help them with the complexities of the college application process. Students soon realize they are receiving a myriad of mixed messages. They understand the financial and emotional costs of going to college early on and must decide if the benefits outweigh those costs. However, the factors impacting college attitudes and attendance do not stop there. The influence of peers often reinforces or overrides the educational values and lessons parents try so hard to ingrain in their children.

Peers

Not surprisingly, the decisions of those in an individual's peer group closely parallel the decisions of that individual. Students typically surround themselves with friends with similar academic goals. Griffin and Allen (2006) conducted a study comparing African American high-achieving students at a well-resourced suburban high school and a low-resource urban high school. They found that "black high achievers attending both high schools relied on their peers for support and encouragement throughout their college preparation processes" (p. 488). Multiple accounts from these students showed that their peer groups strengthened their college ambitions, assisted each other with applications and financial aid, and supported each other when obstacles arose. Sokatch (2006) found that the educational plans of friends directly affects how likely an inner-city, disadvantaged, minority student is to register at least part-time in a university.

Unfortunately, not all academically advanced students can easily find friends who share their educational goals. The school an individual attends often determines the people that eventually become their friends due to the large amount of time spent there. In addition to providing a peer group, a student's school possesses many of the remaining key factors that lead to higher education. The teachers, counselors, and curriculum all play extremely important roles in a student's decision to attend college. When the family is unable to provide the necessary encouragement and information for college due to their lack of education or time, this responsibility falls to the school (Freeman, 2005).

School: Teachers

Teachers are often blamed for a students' lack of academic success due to the direct educational connection they share. While that is not always an accurate

assumption, teachers do have a large impact on students' views regarding their academic potential in school and college. In fact, the positive, inspiring influence of just one teacher can sometimes be the catalyst that moves a student to pursue college (Levine & Nidiffer, 1996). After interviewing African American students about their ideal teacher, Freeman (2005) summarized it this way: they want teachers "who instill a passion in students, believe in the ability of African American students to learn and who push students to maximize their potential" (p. 63). However, such teachers can be difficult to find and to maintain, particularly in school districts that are considered "failing", and demoralization may be rampant (Payne, 2008). It is clear that teachers who have high expectations of their students and do not allow them to simply "get by" give their students the best chance to excel in school. Of the African American 12th grade males Barnes (1992) studied, almost half regarded having outstanding teachers as the reason they stayed in school, indicating that the best teachers will turn out the best students. However, teachers at lower performing or less well-resourced schools may be drawn into the self-perpetuating cycle of low expectations and student failure, often conveying this attitude to their students as well. As a result, students might pass up college preparatory classes, extracurricular activities, and important college information because they do not believe they are capable of going to college (Freeman, 2005). It can become a vicious cycle where students perform poorly, teachers try to improve this, but are often faced with discouraged children, busy, inattentive parents, and little school support, which can cause teachers to lose hope and lower their expectations, therefore, perpetuating the students' poor academic performance.

School: Academic Tracking

In addition, many schools have one or more forms of academic tracking. Based on test scores and classroom performance, students are placed in remedial, vocational-technical, regular, or advanced classes, with obvious implications for their educational achievement. Tracking practices are well intended, attempting to “organize schools so that students who appear similar in their educational needs and potential can be taught together, and taught separately from other students” (Oakes & Lipton, 1996, p. 168). However, the practice is controversial, especially since the majority of students placed in remedial or special education classes are African American or Latino. Tracking minority and low-income students into low performing classes, then, limits their opportunities to develop the skills they need for college and a career. Further complicating the situation, teachers assigned to the low track students are typically less-experienced and less-qualified because the best teachers are reserved for the most promising students (Oakes & Lipton, 1996). By combining unchallenging coursework and mediocre teachers, tracking becomes another obstacle in the path to higher education.

School: Curriculum

While teachers and tracking are somewhat obvious factors in the college choice process, a school’s curriculum also contributes to the value a student places on education. For minority students, an absence of their culture from the curriculum could decrease their engagement with learning. Those who find their coursework interesting and relevant are far more likely to succeed in school since it is not a struggle to convince them to do their work (Ladson-Billings, 2002). However, when an individual finds nothing in their schoolwork to connect with culturally, they begin to lose interest and fall behind.

Freeman addresses the effect of curriculum on African American students, recognizing that “the omission of individuals’ culture from the master script, especially history courses, . . . makes them feel as though they have no cultural relevance” and that their exclusion furthers their idea that college is not for them (2005, p. 56). A curriculum that threatens to track minorities into remedial courses and disregards their history and beliefs does nothing but cause them to question their identity and ability to succeed in education.

School: Guidance Counseling

While teachers, tracking, and curriculum play significant roles in the college choice process, the school counselor is often the gatekeeper to college and has the greatest influence. McDonough (1997) defines the guidance counselor as “the organizational representative who summarizes her or his own perceptions and transmits them to the rest of the school, thus becoming an important source of information within the high school” (p. 91). Therefore, the opinions and attitudes of the counselor have a significant impact on how the school and the students approach college choice. The counselor’s perceptions, though, are usually drawn from what they believe the parents’ and community’s expectations are for college, as well as from their previous experience with college choice (McDonough, 1997). The students and school officials interviewed by Freeman (2005) reported that having a counselor interested in helping students achieve their college plans increased the number of students who applied to college. However, for some students, counselors have a negative influence if they deliver discouraging, apathetic messages to students who truly want to attend college (Freeman, 2005). For students who are largely unfamiliar with the daunting process of college

application and enrollment, their guidance counselor serves as their main source of information and more importantly, support.

While the impact of an encouraging counselor might help an underprivileged, yet motivated young person, in order to truly have an effect on every student in a school, a structured guidance and counseling program has been shown to be effective. Freeman (2005) commented that schools with these structured programs (mostly private, independent, and magnet schools) are also the schools that send the most students to college. She found that the most important feature of these particular guidance programs is their structure and organized nature. Students in 10th grade are required to start meeting with a counselor, even if it is just to review their current plans, giving them the opportunity to obtain valuable information and ask questions (Freeman, 2005). Creating connections between the high school and local colleges and implementing mentoring programs in conjunction with counseling programs are also discussed by Freeman as ways to promote college attendance (2005). Clearly, counseling programs, and the school's college attitude as a whole, provide services to students that low-SES, minority parents cannot, becoming a much needed part of the college choice process in these communities.

It can be concluded that the first step of the college-going process for economically disadvantaged, minority students is a positive family environment where education is a priority and college is encouraged. While the family forms the foundation of higher educational attainment, the school also plays a large role in maintaining college aspirations. According to Willis (1995), the school atmosphere, especially for students who are predominantly low-income African-American, should resemble that of a

supportive family. Specifically, the school should hold all teachers and students to high expectations and maintain positive attitudes, so that everyone involved feels as though they are contributing to furthering education. It is this combination of family and school that ultimately determines whether students choose to value education. Over time, the impact and expectations of parents, siblings, friends, teachers, counselors, the school, the community, and society converge to influence the formation of an individual's educational attitude. Unfortunately, even if this attitude is positive and the individual thinks of college as the next step in their education, they may not achieve it.

Attitude-Achievement Paradox

Ogbu (1978) and Mickelson (1990) defined the “attitude-achievement paradox”, as, African American students’ continual poor academic performance in school despite the culture’s strong emphasis on educational attainment. Ogbu explained in his book, Minority Education and Caste (1978) that people placed under a job ceiling (such as African Americans) realize this fact and it trickles down to affect the educational achievement of their children. Therefore, “black youths, for quite rational reasons, perceive the opportunity structure differently from middle-class whites and consequently tend to put less effort and commitment into their schoolwork” Ogbu claims, as cited by Mickelson (1990, p. 45). This is thought to be a key reason as to why African Americans, and minorities in general, achieve less academically even though most assert they want to go to college.

Continuing Ogbu’s work, Mickelson reported empirical evidence that black students’ poor performance is partly due to their correct discernment between the educational outcomes and returns of whites compared to blacks. From her findings,

Mickelson (1990) realizes that the “root of the attitude/achievement paradox is an inadequate conceptualization and measurement of students’ attitudes toward education” and that “all students, both black and white, hold two sets of attitudes toward school” (p. 45). The first she calls “abstract attitudes” and represents a central tenet in American society, the right to a good education which should ultimately lead to “success and upward mobility”. However, these educational attitudes are in conflict with those she refers to as “concrete attitudes”. This second set of attitudes recognize the various, actual educational realities and outcomes of individuals in a certain group, and are “derived from a person’s experiences in her or his family and community” (p. 46). Therefore, the concrete attitudes of students differ based on their observations of how the perceived job ceiling affects the adults in their lives, whereas all students hold similar abstract attitudes, believing that education is the road to opportunity. Mickelson states that previous research on the attitude/achievement paradox has been trying to compare abstract attitudes to school performance, when really it is necessary to instead compare concrete attitudes to school performance, at which point the positive attitude, low achievement paradox disappears (1990). Applying the abstract and concrete attitudes that Mickelson studied in 1990 to many of today’s struggling school systems may explain why students overwhelmingly state they are going to college, yet have a difficult time even graduating high school. It is possible that the students of the Memphis City School system realize the necessity and importance of education in achieving their life goals (abstract), but come to accept that college might not be an option for them due to a combination of family, school, and personal influences (concrete).

Mickelson's concept of abstract and concrete attitudes combined with the college choice models of Hossler and Gallagher (1987) and Freeman (2005) drive the present study's inquiry into the college attitudes and preparedness of Memphis City School students. The goal of this study is to explore the thoughts and beliefs of past and present MCS students in regards to college, as well as their degree of academic readiness. With the students' college attitudes and preparedness being measured both quantitatively and qualitatively, the hope is to thoroughly answer the following questions, giving the Memphis community a better understanding of what and why the students believe the way they do.

- **What do MCS students think and know?**
 - How are they performing academically in terms of ACT College Readiness Standards? Has their school placed them on track to succeed in college? What are the group differences between race and gender?
 - What are their current educational goals and college predisposition?
 - How does parents' education level affect the students' academic performance?
- **What do MCS graduates who are now enrolled in college think and believe?**
 - What was their MCS experience?
 - What did MCS excel at in terms of the school factors discussed above?
 - What improvements or changes need to be made?
 - How did MCS prepare students for college and did it work?
 - What were the obstacles, attitudes and motivation for college of these students?
 - Why do so many MCS students fail to attend college – or even to graduate

Methods

Participants

The majority of the quantitative data on college preparedness comes from the EXPLORE test scores of approximately 14,000 MCS 8th grade students over a two year period: 7,676 students in 2007-2008 and 7,192 in 2008-2009. Students from 25 different Memphis City schools are represented. Participants were 50.3% male and 49.6% female. The race/ethnicity of participants was categorized into four groups for the analyses

conducted here. The sample included 12,374 African American students (87.9%); 858 Caucasians (6.1%); 672 Hispanic/Latinos, which includes Mexican Americans, Chicanos, Cubans, and Puerto Ricans (4.8%); and 178 Asian American/Pacific Islanders (1.3%).

Memphis City Schools' high school graduates who are currently attending college were recruited to participate in the College Attitudes and Preparedness Survey.

Recruitment occurred at three colleges located in the greater Memphis community.

Participants were recruited via email/Internet at two of the colleges and by personal

request during a classroom visit at the other college. The total number of participants

who completed the survey was 89. There were 28 participants from College 1, 43 from

College 2, and 18 from College 3. The total sample consisted of 19 undergraduate men

(21.3%) and 70 undergraduate women (78.7%). The majority of the sample was African

American (71.9%), but Caucasians and Asian Americans were also represented (16.9%

and 7.9%, respectively). One participant chose Other to describe their ethnicity and 2

participants chose not to respond to this question. The distribution of race/ethnicity is

reflective of the city and the Memphis City School System. First-year college students

represented 36% of the sample, second years – 25.8%, third years – 19.1%, fourth years –

13.5%, and 5.6% had been in college five or more years. The graduation years of the

participants ranged from 1969 to 2009 ($M = 2005$, $Mode = 2009$, $s = 7.49$). Participants

attended 25 different Memphis City Schools.

Instruments

The instrument used to assess the college preparedness of present MCS students

was the EXPLORE test, which is “designed to measure [8th and 9th grade] students’

curriculum-related knowledge and the complex cognitive skills important for future

education and careers. EXPLORE results provide students with information that can help them begin making plans for high school and beyond” as described by the Administrator’s Handbook (EXPLORE, 2006, p. 8). It is composed of four sections: English (including Usage/Mechanics and Rhetorical Skills), Reading, Math, and Science. The EXPLORE test is the first of three tests in the ACT Educational Planning and Assessment System (EPAS). It serves as a baseline of a student’s knowledge level as they transition to high school and advises them on the courses they should take in high school to reach their educational/career goals. The second test, the PLAN, is taken during the 10th grade and assesses academic progress while there is still time to get students back on track toward their educational plans. The ACT is the final test in the system, taken in 11th and 12th grade. As one of the most common college entrance exams, the ACT measures academic ability and aptitude so a smooth transition to college can be anticipated (EXPLORE Administrator’s Handbook, 2006).

The EXPLORE produces standard scores, ranging from 1 to 25 in all four areas as well as a composite score, which is an average of the 4 subject scores. Further, the EXPLORE provides College Readiness Benchmark Scores; scores that meet the benchmark indicate the student has a 50 percent chance of obtaining a B or better in the corresponding college-level course. The Benchmark Scores are based on the actual grades of ACT-tested students in their first-year college courses of English Composition, College Algebra, Social Science, and College Biology. Students who score at the Benchmark Score or higher are shown they are on track to developing the skills in order to do well in these college courses and those who score lower are made aware of the areas needing improvement.

The feature that differentiates the EXPLORE test from other standardized tests and makes it valuable in determining educational and career goals is the inclusion of several non-cognitive assessments. The Student Information Section provides necessary demographic information, such as age, race, and gender. To understand the needs of the students, a Needs Assessment asks examinees to indicate whether they would like more assistance in seven different academic categories. As part of the test, the students also take the UNIACT Interest Inventory, the ACT's career exploration assessment based on Holland's (1997) theory of careers. It provides students a broad idea of the areas of work matching their interests, so teachers, parents, and students can begin to develop an appropriate educational plan for the future. The students also complete a Plans and Background section. It includes primary language, the courses they plan to take in high school, whether they participate in advanced, honors, or outreach programs, the parents' education levels, and post-high school educational and career plans.

In addition to the quantitative data that the EXPLORE test provides, a more qualitative method was designed to increase understanding of the kinds of attitudes and preparation for college MCS students received during high school. The College Attitudes and Preparedness (CAP) Survey was created and administered online to two colleges and on paper to one college. It is made up of 28 questions and takes approximately 15 to 30 minutes to complete. The survey consists of a variety of multiple choice and short essay questions meant to gain information on the participants' demographics, high school and college enrollment, high school experience, college choice process, college preparation, and opinions/advice on improving MCS. Questions were developed through a combination of deductive reasoning and previous research. Many of the questions were

also created in such a way that analyses could compare responses from the survey to data from the EXPLORE test. Questions relating to college grades and college attendance plans all correspond to EXPLORE data. The survey can be found in Appendix A.

Procedures

The EXPLORE test was administered to 8th grade students in September of 2007 and again in September and October of 2008 by Memphis City School test administrators. The two datasets of test scores and career planning responses were obtained from the Memphis City School system in August of 2009 with permission to analyze and report any significant findings. IRB approval was given by Rhodes College to conduct this research using the EXPLORE datasets.

The research project and CAP survey were submitted for IRB exemption and approved at three Memphis area colleges. Participants for this portion of the research either took the survey online or by paper and pencil depending on the college they attend. Participants in the survey all attended a Memphis City high school and now attend one of three local colleges. Each college required different recruiting and administration methods as explained below.

College 1: Small, private liberal arts college

A list of current students who had graduated from a MCS was obtained from Information Services after receiving approval from the director. Approximately 60 students were emailed and invited to participate in the research project by taking the survey online through the SurveyMonkey website. By reading the consent form included in the email and clicking on the link to the survey, they gave informed consent for their

responses to be analyzed and possibly published. As an incentive, those who completed the survey were entered into a raffle to win one of two \$50 Visa giftcards.

College 2: Public 4-year University

Recruitment at College 2 occurred through the university's pre-existing Psychology Subject Pool (PSP), of which access was obtained through a partnership with a university professor. The survey was administered through the PSP website, Sonasystems, and asked participants to only take the survey if they had attended a Memphis City School. The informed consent form was the first page of the survey. By reading through it and proceeding with the survey, participants gave their consent. Participants received 30 minutes of research credit as incentive to take the survey. To satisfy the requests of the IRB at this institution and obtain approval, the Visa giftcard incentive was not included. Fifty people started the survey, but the responses of 7 participants were discarded due them not actually graduating from a MCS or not completing the survey.

College 3: 2-year Community College

Approval to administer the survey at College 3 was given by the Executive Director of Planning and Analysis. Due to the fact that many of the students at this college do not typically have consistent access to a computer, the survey was transferred to paper form and administered to a class during its scheduled meeting time. For time and ease, the survey was altered slightly so it could be given to all the students in a class regardless of the high school they attended. The content of the questions remained exactly the same, but the specific references to the Memphis City Schools were changed to the more generic terms, "high school" and "school system". Before taking the survey, the participants were asked to read and sign a consent form, which explained the purpose

of the study and their right to refuse to take the survey or discontinue it at any time. Once the consent forms were collected, those who chose to participate filled out the survey and turned it into the administrator. Those who participated also received an incentive of entrance into a raffle for two \$50 Visa giftcards. The surveys were then separated into MCS students and non-MCS students, and the MCS student surveys were coded and analyzed. The responses of the non-MCS students will be used at a later date.

Open-ended survey responses were coded by 3 raters after developing and finding reliability on the coding manual. An interrater reliability analysis using the Kappa statistic was performed to determine consistency among raters.

Results

Analyses of EXPLORE composite test scores

To determine whether there were differences between the participants who took the EXPLORE in 2007 and those who took the test in 2008, a oneway ANOVA was conducted using test year as the independent variable (IV) and the Composite score as well as the scale scores in English, Math, Reading, and Science as the dependent variables (DVs). The only significant difference was for the Science scale score ($F(1, 14,469) = 20.92; p < .001$). Participants who took the test in 2008 scored significantly higher on the Science section ($M = 14.64, SD = 2.96$) than participants who took it in 2007 ($M = 14.42, SD = 2.94$). The two sets of test scores were combined into one large dataset in order to better analyze differences between racial/ethnic groups as some had smaller numbers of students (e.g. Asian Americans). It was determined that having only one score difference between years would not affect overall analyses and results.

Composite scores were analyzed first to get an understanding of the general academic level of the participants who took the EXPLORE assessment. A 2 (Gender) X 4 (Race) ANOVA was conducted to explore the effects of gender and race/ethnicity on the composite score, which is the average of the four subject area test scores (see Table 1). Main effects for gender [$F(1, 13,579) = 24.09, p < .001$] and race/ethnicity [$F(3, 13,579) = 667.94, p < .001$] were found to be significant. Post-hoc comparisons were made using Tukey's HSD to identify differences according to race/ethnicity. Female students' Composite scores ($M = 13.36$) were significantly higher than the scores of their male counterparts ($M = 12.56$). In addition, Caucasian and Asian American students scored significantly higher than the African American and Hispanic/Latino students ($M = 16.37, 16.45, 12.67, \text{ and } 12.87$, respectively). A significant interaction between gender and race/ethnicity was also discovered [$F(3, 13,579) = 6.10, p < .001$]. African American females ($M = 13.12$) earned significantly higher scores than did African American males ($M = 12.21$). The same was true of Caucasian females and males, whose respective means were 16.53 and 16.24.

Table 1. Composite score means and standard deviations by race/ethnicity and gender.

	African American n = 11,922	Caucasian n = 841	Hispanic/ Latino n = 648	Asian American n = 176	Total n = 13,587
Male n = 6,791	12.21 ^a (2.38) n = 5,884	16.24 ^b (3.69) n = 463	12.71 (2.67) n = 355	16.09 (3.98) n = 89	12.56 ^c (2.76)
Female n = 6,796	13.12 ^a (2.45) n = 6,038	16.53 ^b (3.49) n = 378	13.06 (2.65) n = 293	16.83 (4.09) n = 87	13.36 ^c (2.70)
Total	12.67 ^c (2.46)	16.37 ^{cd} (3.60)	12.87 ^d (2.66)	16.45 ^{cd} (4.04)	12.96 (2.76)

^aAfrican American males < African American females

^bCaucasian males < Caucasian females

^cAfrican Americans < Caucasians & Asian Americans

^dHispanics/Latinos < Caucasians & Asian Americans

^eMales < females

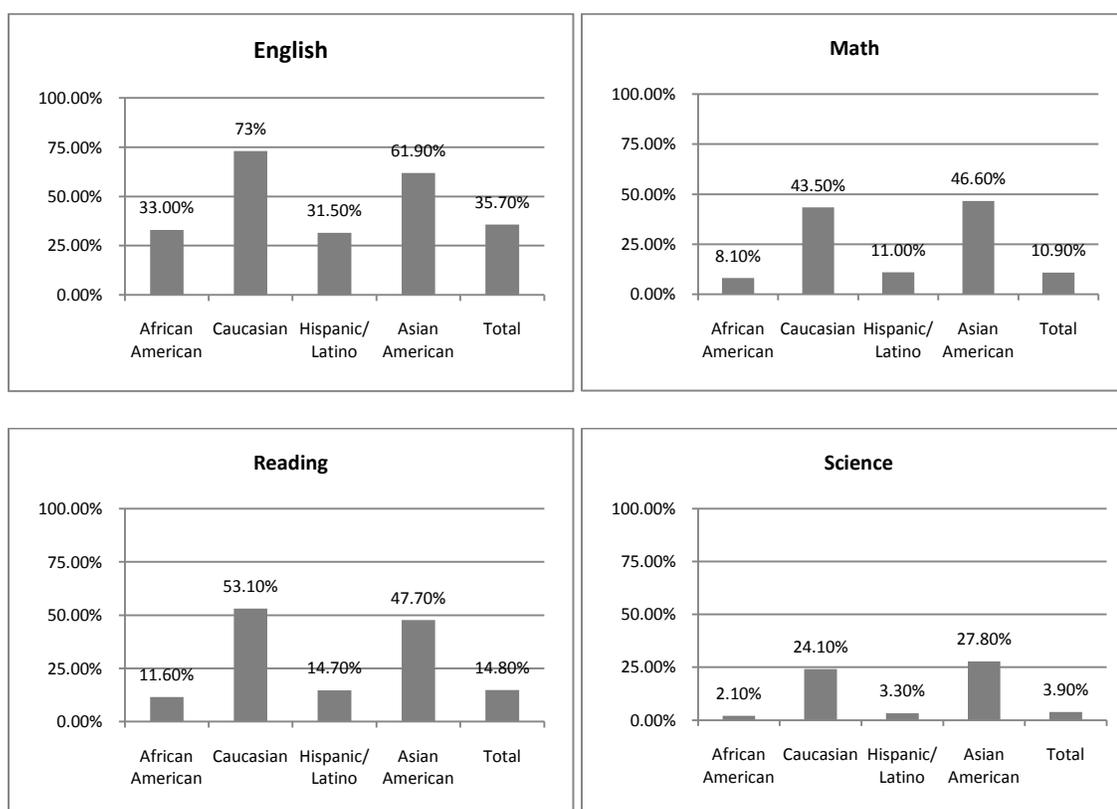
Analysis of College Readiness Benchmark Scores

The College Readiness Benchmark Scores were used to determine the number of participants who were academically prepared for college. The College Readiness Standards for the EXPLORE test sets the following benchmark standards: English – 13, Mathematics – 17, Reading – 15, and Science – 20. Pearson Chi-Square analyses were conducted to determine whether the total number of students meeting or failing to meet benchmarks was different from predicted levels; further, analyses were run to identify significant differences within the racial/ethnic groups in meeting these benchmarks (see Table 2). For these Chi-Square analyses, expected levels were set based on each student having an equal probability of falling below the benchmark or of meeting/exceeding it. Analyses found that 63.9% of the sample scored below and 36.1% scored above the English benchmark [$X^2(4, n=14,094) = 630.51, p < .001, \text{Cramer's } V = .21$]; 88.9% of the sample scored below and 11.1% scored above the Math benchmark [$X^2(4, n = 14,121) = 1252.35, p < .001, \text{Cramer's } V = .30$]; 85.1% of the sample scored below and 14.9% scored above the Reading benchmark [$X^2(4, n = 14090) = 1239.35, p < .001; \text{Cramer's } V = .30$]; and 96.1% of the sample scored below and 3.9% scored above the Science benchmark [$X^2(4, n = 14,069) = 1,285.23, p < .001, \text{Cramer's } V = .30$] Within each ethnic group, the percentage who did or did not meet subject benchmarks differed from expected levels (See Figure 1).

Table 2. Percentage of students who meet or exceed college benchmarks by race/ethnicity.

Benchmark Test	African American n = 12,374	White/ Caucasian n = 858	Hispanic/ Latino n = 672	Asian American n = 178	Total n = 14,458
English	33% n = 3973	73% n = 618	31.5% n = 205	61.9% n = 109	35.7% n = 4905
Math	8.1% n = 978	43.5% n = 369	11.0% n = 72	46.6% n = 82	10.9% n = 1501
Reading	11.6% n = 1396	53.1% n = 450	14.7% n = 96	47.7% n = 84	14.8% n = 2026
Science	2.1% n = 257	24.1% n = 204	3.3% n = 22	27.8% n = 49	3.9% n = 532

Figure 1. Percentage of students who meet or exceed college benchmarks by race/ethnicity.



Analysis of EXPLORE subject scores and self-reported grades

It might be expected that students who score above the benchmark score earn good grades in the corresponding 8th grade core course. To test this assumption, four oneway ANOVAs were conducted, using the scale scores for each subject as the DVs and the participants' reported grades earned in the corresponding school subject as the IV (see Table 3). Participants were asked to choose whether they made mostly As, mostly Bs, mostly Cs, mostly Ds, or mostly Fs in English, Math, Social Science, and Natural Science. Results showed significant differences between scale scores and reported earned grades in English [$F(4, 13,110) = 322.09, p < .001$], in Math [$F(4, 1,936) = 333.48, p < .001$], in Social Science [$F(4, 12,980) = 37.81, p < .001$], and in Natural Science [$F(4, 12,311) = 284.72, p < .001$]. Post-hoc comparisons using Tukey's HSD indicated that participants who reported making As scored significantly higher in all subjects than participants making B's or lower. Participants who reported mostly Bs scored significantly higher than participants with Cs or lower. Those who reported mostly Cs scored significantly higher than participants with Ds or lower. There were no significant differences in subject scores between participants who made mostly Ds and Fs. While students reporting mostly As obtained the highest EXPLORE scale scores in each subject, only those with As in English averaged a scale score ($M = 13.59$) that reached the corresponding English Benchmark of 13.

Table 3. Relationship between participants' subject scale scores and self-reported grades for each subject

Reported Grades	Subject Scale Score			
	English Mean ^a (SD)	Math Mean ^a (SD)	Reading Mean ^a (SD)	Science Mean ^a (SD)
Mostly Fs	9.94 (2.80) n = 150	10.25 (3.32) n = 217	10.59 (1.71) n = 227	13.15 (2.53) n = 256
Mostly Ds	10.34 (2.47) n = 415	10.72 (3.07) n = 758	10.71 (1.86) n = 957	13.22 (2.66) n = 956
Mostly Cs	10.88 (2.63) n = 3071	11.66 (3.17) n = 3148	11.39 (2.16) n = 3596	13.98 (2.55) n = 3583
Mostly Bs	12.21 (3.21) n = 5497	12.76 (3.35) n = 4833	12.19 (2.63) n = 4793	14.78 (2.62) n = 4502
Mostly As	13.59 (4.29) n = 3982	14.11 (3.77) n = 3985	13.46 (3.71) n = 3412	15.91 (3.40) n = 3019
Total	12.23 (3.60) n = 13115	12.75 (3.60) n = 12941	12.16 (2.93) n = 12985	14.67 (2.94) n = 12316

^aMostly Ds & Mostly Fs < Mostly Cs < Mostly Bs < Mostly As; $p < .001$

Analyses of Post-high School Educational Aspirations

In order to measure college attitudes from the EXPLORE assessment dataset, the reported post-high school educational plans of participants were analyzed using Pearson Chi-Squares and analyses of variance (See Table 4). Of the 14,868 participants, 11,771 indicated their educational plans after high school, which fell into four categories. Those who did not anticipate graduating high school represented 0.7% ($n = 77$) of the sample. The participants who planned to stop their education with a high school diploma or GED made up 1.2% of the sample ($n = 142$). Obtaining education and job training through the military, an apprenticeship, a career/technical school, or at a 2-year community college was reported by 17.6% of the participants ($n = 2,076$). The 80.5% who remained planned

to attend a 4-year college or university or graduate/professional school (n = 9,476). Regarding the post-high school plans of various racial/ethnic groups, African-Americans and Caucasians reported similar educational aspirations to each other and the total sample. However, Hispanic/Latinos reported lower educational aspirations than the sample, while Asian American had the second largest group of students not planning to graduate high school, but the highest number of students reporting wanting to attend a 4-year university or higher. In other words, Asian American students intend either to not graduate high school or to continue their education after high school; none of them indicate their high school diploma as a terminal degree.

Table 4. Percentage of students in racial/ethnic groups self-reporting various post-high school options.

Post-high school plans	Racial/Ethnic groups				Total n = 11,205
	African American n = 9,933	White/ Caucasian n = 678	Hispanic/ Latino n = 445	Asian American n = 149	
Not graduating HS	0.6%	0.3%	2.2%	1.3%	0.6%
HS Diploma	1.0%	1.9%	5.8%	0.0%	1.2%
Career/Technical School; Community College	17.6%	15.9%	26.1%	8.1%	17.7%
4 year University or higher	80.8%	81.9%	65.8%	90.6%	80.4%

A oneway ANOVA was conducted to determine the relationship between students' post-high school plans and their scale scores in English, Math, Reading, and Science and on the Composite score. Students post-graduate plans were categorized as follows: Not graduate high school; graduate high school with no further training; receive

some training or college, such as a 2-year degree; or earn a bachelor's degree or higher. Scale score differences were found for all subjects based on students' post-graduate plans (see Table 5): English ($F(3, 5,842) = 90.97; p < .001$); Math ($F(3, 5,844) = 79.77; p < .001$); Reading ($F(3, 5,827) = 45.14; p < .001$); Science ($F(3, 5,816) = 57.47; p < .001$); and Composite ($F(3, 5,781) = 92.25; p < .001$). To identify which groups were significantly different from each other, post-hoc tests were conducted using Tukey's HSD to correct for Type I error. All differences reported here are significant at the $p < .05$ level unless otherwise stated; see Table 5 for exact p values, means, and standard deviations.

On the English scale score, students who planned to not finish high school and those who planned to graduate with no further training scored significantly lower than their peers who planned to obtain some training or to attend college (respective means = 8.81, 9.59, 10.59, and 11.80). Students planning to earn a bachelor's degree scored higher than students who said they would get some training. On the Math scale, the same pattern of scores is evident. Students planning to obtain a bachelor's degree or higher had a mean score of 12.44, which was significantly higher than students intending to attend some training or 2-year college (11.12), and both groups scored above students who said they would graduate high school with no further training/education (10.07) or not graduate high school (9.39). Scores on the Reading scale displayed a slightly varied set of differences. Once again, college-bound students ($M = 11.83$) scored higher than students aspiring to some training ($M = 11.10$), a high school diploma ($M = 10.59$) and those who said they would drop out of high school ($M = 9.92$). Students who indicated intentions to obtain some training after high school scored higher than individuals who did not expect to graduate from high school. On the Science portion of the EXPLORE test, students who

said they would not graduate H.S. and those intending to graduate H.S. performed less well than participants aspiring to obtain some training or to earning a bachelor's degree or higher ($M = 12.26, 12.43, 13.49,$ and $14.35,$ respectively). Last, on the Composite score, students without plans to complete high school ($M = 10.30$) were no different than students who planned to graduate with no further training ($M = 10.81$). Both groups scored significantly lower than students intending to obtain some training ($M = 11.74$) and those who aspired to a four-year college degree ($M = 12.75$).

Table 5. EXPLORE scale score means and standard deviations according to students' post-high school plans.

EXPLORE Scales	Not graduate High School Mean (SD)	High School/No further training Mean (SD)	Some training/2-year degree Mean (SD)	Bachelor's degree or higher Mean (SD)	Total Sample Mean (SD)
English ^a	8.81 (2.35) n = 72	9.59 (2.87) n = 135	10.59 (2.94) n = 1,368	11.80 (3.30) n = 4,271	11.43 (3.27) n = 5,846
Math ^b	9.39 (3.10) n = 72	10.07 (3.48) n = 134	11.12 (3.61) n = 1,371	12.44 (3.42) n = 4,271	12.04 (3.53) n = 5,858
Reading ^c	9.92 (1.76) n = 71	10.59 (1.87) n = 134	11.10 (2.23) n = 1,365	11.83 (2.73) n = 4,261	11.61 (2.62) n = 5,831
Science ^d	12.26 (2.69) n = 70	12.43 (2.88) n = 134	13.49 (2.88) n = 1,363	14.35 (2.81) n = 4,253	14.08 (2.87) n = 5,820
Composite ^e	10.30 (1.66) n = 70	10.80 (2.09) n = 133	11.74 (2.33) n = 1,350	12.75 (2.58) n = 4,232	12.44 (2.56) n = 5,785

^aNot graduate H.S. & graduate H.S. < Some training < College; $p \leq .003$

^bNot graduate H.S. & graduate H.S. < Some training < College; $p \leq .005$

^cAll groups < College; $p < .001$; Not graduate H.S. < Some training; $p < .001$

^dNot graduating H.S. & graduate H.S. < Some training < College; $p \leq .002$

^eNot graduate H.S. & graduate H.S. < Some training < College; $p < .001$

^dNot graduating H.S. & graduate H.S. < Some training < College; $p \leq .002$

^eNot graduate H.S. & graduate H.S. < Some training < College; $p < .001$

An oneway ANOVA was also conducted to determine whether there were differences between racial/ethnic groups on the four EXPLORE subject scale scores (English, Math, Reading, and Science). Using each of the subject scores as dependent variables and race/ethnicity as the independent variable, there were significant effects in English ($F(3, 13,724) = 472.18; p < .001$); Math ($F(3, 13,750) = 396.55; p < .001$); Reading ($F(3, 13,719) = 609.46; p < .001$); and Science ($F(3, 13,699) = 357.83; p < .001$). Post-hoc tests were conducted using Tukey's HSD to correct for Type I error. Unless otherwise noted, all of the differences reported here are significant at the $p < .05$ level; see Table 6 for exact p values, means, and standard deviations. On the English scale score, African American ($M = 11.79$) and Hispanic/Latino (11.60) students scored significantly lower than their Caucasian (15.98) and Asian American (15.61) peers. On the Math scale, Caucasians (15.95) once again scored significantly higher than African American (12.28) and Hispanic/Latino (12.62) students. Asian American students obtained a mean score of 16.98 , outscoring the three other racial/ethnic groups. In Reading, African American students had a mean score of 11.75 , which was significantly lower than the scores of their counterparts – Caucasian (15.55), Hispanic/Latino (12.07), and Asian American (15.27). In addition, Caucasian and Asian American students' scores were significantly higher than the Hispanic/Latino eighth graders scores. The Science scale score differences were as follows: Caucasians ($M = 17.26$) and Asian Americans (17.52) scored higher than African American (14.28) and Hispanic/Latino (14.55) students.

Table 6. EXPLORE scale score means and standard deviations by race/ethnicity.

EXPLORE Scales	African American Mean (SD)	Caucasian Mean (SD)	Hispanic/Latino Mean (SD)	Asian American Mean (SD)	Total Mean (SD)
English ^a	11.79 (3.24) n = 12,055	15.98 (4.75) n=847	11.60 (3.31) n = 650	15.61 (5.19) n = 176	12.08 (3.56) n = 13,728
Math ^b	12.28 (3.40) n = 12,073	15.95 (3.81) n = 848	12.62 (3.47) n = 657	16.98 (4.40) n = 176	12.58 (3.59) n = 13,754
Reading ^c	11.75 (2.52) n = 12,045	15.55 (4.13) n = 847	12.07 (2.77) n = 655	15.27 (4.46) n = 176	12.05 (2.87) n = 13,723
Science ^a	14.28 (2.75) n = 12,024	17.26 (3.53) n = 846	14.55 (2.90) n = 657	17.52 (3.84) n = 176	14.52 (2.94) n = 13,703

^aAfrican American & Hispanic/Latino < Caucasian & Asian American; $p < .001$

^bAfrican American & Hispanic/Latino < Caucasian < Asian American; $p < .001$

^cAfrican American < Hispanic/Latino < Caucasian & Asian American; $p < .02$

Analysis of Mother's Education and Race/Ethnicity on Composite Score

Previous research has found that, in addition to race/ethnicity, parents' education level impacts their children's educational goals, and their ability to achieve those goals. Therefore, statistical analyses were conducted to investigate the relationship between parents' education level and race on the participants' composite test score, expanding the previous analysis of just race/ethnicity and test scores. Frequency distributions were constructed to examine the participants' reported parental education level (see Table 7). Results show that approximately a third of the sample did not know their mother's highest level of education (N=5,043) and about half of the sample did not know their father's highest level of education (N=7,363). To avoid confounding the results of analyses, students who reported not knowing their parents' education levels were omitted

from the following analyses. Given that children in single parent homes are most often in the custody of their mothers and that half of the students did not know their father's education level, the mother's education level was used in the statistical analyses reported below.

Table 7. Reported Education Level of Participants' Mother and Father

Parent	Unknown	Less than H. S.	H.S. Diploma/ GED	Career/Technical or 2-year college	4 year University or higher
Mother	33.9% n = 5,043	10.0% n = 1,481	21.0% n = 3,126	19.8% n = 2,946	15.3% n = 2,272
Father	49.5% n = 7,363	8.9% n = 1,328	15.5% n = 2,311	16.3% n = 2,421	9.7% n = 1,445

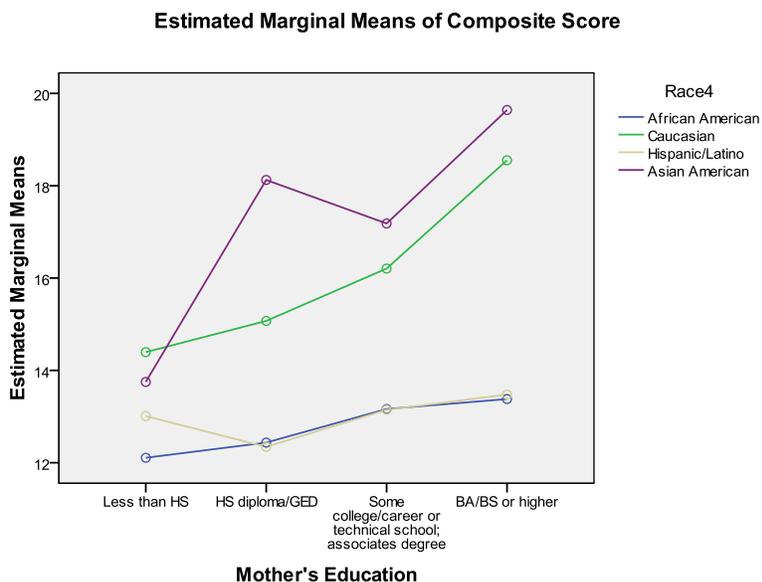
A two-way between groups analysis of variance was conducted to investigate the impact of race/ethnicity and mother's education level on the participants' composite EXPLORE score. Mother's education was reported as either less than high school; high school diploma or G.E.D.; some college or Career/Technical/2-year college; and 4-year college or higher. A significant interaction effect was found between race/ethnicity and mother's education level, ($F(12, 9262) = 15.57, p = .00, R^2 = .19$). Post-hoc analyses were conducted using four one-way ANOVAs. A one-way ANOVA with race/ethnicity as the IV and composite score as the DV was conducted at each level of the mother's education (H.S., H.S. diploma/GED, Some college/2-year college; 4-year college or higher). Results showed significant differences in composite score between races within each level of the mother's education. In terms of race, Caucasians and Asian Americans achieved significantly higher composite scores than African Americans and Hispanics/Latinos, regardless of the mother's education level. However, if the mother

was reported not to have completed high school, the range of the average composite score between races is smaller ($R = 12.11 - 14.40$), but as the mother's education level increases, the range widens. If the mother has a bachelor's degree or higher, the mean composite score for each race is as follows: African American = 13.38, Caucasian = 18.55, Hispanic/Latino = 13.48 and Asian American = 19.64. African American and Hispanic/Latino participants only managed a 1.27 and .466 point gain, respectively, in their composite score if their mother had a bachelor's degree compared to mothers who did not graduate from high school, whereas Caucasian and Asian American participants had 4.15 and 5.89 point gains, respectively. See Table 8 and Figure 2 for complete mean differences.

Table 8. Composite score means for racial/ethnic groups by mother's education level.

Race/Ethnicity	Mother's Education Level				Total
	Less than High School	HS Diploma/GED	Some college/2-year college	Bachelor's Degree or higher	
African American	12.11 (2.12) n = 1,094	12.44 (2.26) n = 2,702	13.16 (2.54) n = 2,457	13.38 (2.82) n = 1,765	12.82 (2.51) n = 8,018
Caucasian	14.40 (2.88) n = 43	15.07 (2.87) n = 141	16.21 (3.37) n = 175	18.55 (3.42) n = 239	16.75 (3.60) n = 598
Hispanic/Latino	13.01 (2.34) n = 193	12.34 (2.93) n = 67	13.15 (3.08) n = 55	13.48 (3.56) n = 21	12.93 (2.69) n = 336
Asian American	13.75 (2.53) n = 28	18.13 (3.52) n = 8	17.18 (4.38) n = 11	19.64 (3.91) n = 50	17.54 (4.36) n = 97
Total	12.34 (2.25) n = 1,358	12.58 (2.40) n = 2,918	13.38 (2.74) n = 2,698	14.13 (3.47) n = 2,075	13.14 (2.84) n = 9,049

Figure 2. Estimated composite score marginal means for racial/ethnic groups by mother's education level.



Analyses of College Attitudes and Preparedness (CAP) Survey

The College Attitudes and Preparedness Survey was coded and analyzed by the author and two collaborators. When asked to describe their overall experience in their Memphis City high school, 19.3% of the sample chose “Great” ($n = 17$), “Good” was chosen by 44.3% ($n = 39$), “Decent” by 34.1% ($n = 30$), and “Poor” by 2.3% of the sample ($n = 2$). Participants were also asked to rate various features of their high school experiences (See Table 9). The percentage of respondents rating the following characteristics as Excellent or Good is as follows: Extracurricular Activities - 79.7%; Academics – 71.9%; Social Life – 71.9%; Teachers – 67.1%; College/Career Counseling - 57.3% and Motivated Students – 56.2%.

Table 9. Participants' Ratings of Various Features of their High School Experience in Percentages.

Rating	Features of the High School Experience					
	Academics	College/Career Counseling	Teachers	Motivated Students	Extracurricular Activities	Social Life
Excellent	29.2% n = 26	18.0% n = 16	20.5% n = 18	18.0% n = 16	44.9% n = 40	34.8% n = 31
Good	42.7% n = 38	39.3% n = 35	46.6% n = 41	38.2% n = 34	34.8% n = 31	37.1% n = 33
Decent	16.9% n = 15	23.6% n = 21	26.1% n = 23	29.2% n = 26	13.5% n = 12	18.0% n = 16
Poor	11.2% n = 10	19.1% n = 17	6.7% n = 6	14.6% n = 13	6.7% n = 6	10.1% n = 9
Total	N = 89	N = 89	N = 88	N = 89	N = 89	N = 89

Analysis of Likes and Dislikes of MCS High School

To further assess the participants' feelings about their Memphis City high school, they were asked to share three "Likes" and three "Dislikes" about the school (see Table 10). Their responses were coded by three raters for analysis using the coding manual found in Appendix C. To obtain interrater reliability, each rater coded 34 survey responses (13%) randomly selected for this analysis. The interrater reliabilities for the raters of the "Like" responses were found to be Kappas = 0.80, 0.83, 0.84 ($p < .001$). Once reliability was established, the remaining 211 "Like" responses were coded. Participants reported liking the faculty and/or staff of their high school more than any other category (28%). Social/Extracurricular Activities (18.0%), Academics, (15.2%), and Student Body/Environment (11.4%) were also mentioned most frequently as something participants liked about their MCS high schools.

To obtain interrater reliability for this "Dislikes" responses, the same procedure was followed. The three raters initially coded 34 responses (16%) randomly selected

from the entire dataset. The interrater reliabilities for the raters of the “Dislikes” responses was found to be Kappas = 0.71, 0.78, 0.89 ($p < .001$). Once reliability was established, the remaining 184 “Dislike” responses were analyzed. Student body/environment (22.3%) and the discipline/structure/rules (20.1%) of their MCS high school were the chief complaints of the participants who responded. Faculty/staff (19.6%) and school facilities/location (13.6%) were also mentioned frequently as common “Dislikes”.

Table 10. Survey Respondents’ Reported Likes and Dislikes in their MCS High Schools.

Area	Liked	Disliked
Academics	15.2% n = 32	9.2% n = 17
Faculty/Staff	28.0% n = 59	19.6% n = 36
Diversity	2.8% n = 6	0.5% n = 1
Arts	1.9% n = 4	0.5% n = 1
AP/Honors	3.3% n = 7	0.5% n = 1
Social/Extracurricular Activities	18.0% n = 38	2.2% n = 4
Athletics	5.7% n = 12	1.1% n = 2
Discipline/Structure/Rules	4.7% n = 10	20.1% n = 37
Service Opportunities	0.9% n = 2	0.0% n = 0
School Facilities/Location	3.8% n = 8	13.6% n = 25
Student Body/Environment	11.4% n = 24	22.3% n = 41
Friends	2.4% n = 5	0.5% n = 1
Difference in Academic Care/Discrimination	0.0% n = 0	3.3% n = 6
College Prep/Guidance	1.9% n = 4	6.5% n = 12
Total	N = 211	N = 184

Analysis of College Application Process

When asked about the number of colleges to which they applied, 16 participants (18.2%) reported only applying to the college that they now attend. Of the remaining 72 participants (one subject did not answer this set of questions), 52.1% applied to 2-3 colleges, 25.4% applied to 4-5 colleges, and 22.5% applied to 6 or more colleges. A one-way between groups ANOVA was conducted to compare the number of colleges participants applied to between College 1, College 2, and College 3 students. A significant interaction was found [$F(2, 68) = 16.17, p < .001$]. Post hoc analyses indicate that participants from College 1 applied to more colleges ($M = 2.31$) than participants from College 2 or 3 ($M = 1.32$; $M = 1.45$), where one equaled 2-3 colleges, two equaled 4-5 colleges, and three equaled 6 or more colleges on the survey.

Participants were also asked to identify the people who helped them with the college application process. A majority of the sample reported their mothers helped them (68.5%, $n = 61$). Teachers (43.8%) and guidance counselors (46.1%) were also reported to have assisted participants ($n = 39$, $n = 41$, respectively). About a third of participants said that their fathers (28.1%, $n = 25$) or a friend (29.2%, $n = 26$) was involved with their application process. Siblings were reported as being the least involved in helping the participants apply to college (21.3%, $n = 19$). Five participants (5.6%) reported that they did it on their own and 8 participants (9.0%) stated that someone other than the options given helped them apply to college.

Analysis of College Preparation Availability and Success

The availability of and participation in college preparatory activities offered by high schools was also assessed. Table 11 illustrates the number of participants who

reported their high school offering each college preparatory activity, as well as the number of participants who participated in each activity.

Table 11. Percentage of Participants Reporting Availability of and Participation in College Preparation Activities at their High Schools.

Category	College Preparation Activities				
	Honors/AP Classes	SAT/ACT Prep	College Counseling	College Visits	Application/Fin. Aid Help
Available at HS	88.8%	73.0%	64.0%	62.9%	62.9%
Participated In	n = 79	n = 65	n = 57	n = 56	n = 56
	69.7%	64.0%	49.4%	46.1%	38.2%
	n = 62	n = 57	n = 44	n = 41	n = 34

To obtain a direct measure of the participants' perceived college preparedness, participants were asked to describe how prepared they felt upon graduating high school and/or enrolling in college. The majority reported they felt "somewhat prepared" (44.2%, n = 38). "Very prepared" was described by 29.1% of participants (n = 25) and "a little prepared" was selected by 19.8% (n = 17). Six participants felt "not prepared" (7.0%). Three participants did not answer the question. Similarly, 75.0% of the participants thought that their high school could do more to prepare students for college (n = 66) while 25.0% did not (n = 22).

Survey participants provided estimates of their grades in their college-level classes. Two participants chose to skip this question. Mostly As was reported by 17.2% (n = 15). The majority said they made "Mostly Bs" (60.9%, n = 53). Participants who stated "Mostly Cs" represented 20.7% of the sample (n = 18) and only one participant reported they made "Mostly Fs" (1.1%).

Analysis of Participants' College Obstacles, Attitudes, and Motivation

Finally, to gain a more thorough understanding of the participants' personal journey towards college, their responses to questions pertaining to obstacles to college, attitudes about college, and motivation for college were coded and analyzed. Each set of responses were coded by two raters using the coding manual found in Appendix B. Each rater initially coded 14 responses (15%) randomly selected from the total response set. Once interrater reliability was established ($Kappa = 1.00; p < .001$), the remaining 82 obstacle responses were coded. Over half of those responses (51.2%) indicated the participant experienced no obstacles toward college attendance ($n = 42$). The remaining responses found that finances were the biggest issue for those who wanted to attend college (19.5%, $n = 16$), followed by a feeling of academic unpreparedness and/or low grades (13.4%, $n = 11$).

Table 12. Reported obstacles of survey respondents.

Obstacle	Frequency
No Obstacle	51.2% n = 42
Finances	19.5% n = 16
Academic unpreparedness/low grades	13.4% n = 11
Lack of motivation	1.2% n = 1
Family Obligations	1.2% n = 1
Low morale/expectations	2.4% n = 2
Lack of guidance with application process	6.1% n = 5
Social/ Peer pressure	4.9% n = 4
Total	N = 82

To determine the attitudes toward college of MCS students in general, survey respondents were asked to relate how they remembered feeling or how their high school peers felt about going to college. To obtain interrater reliability, two raters initially coded 13 randomly chosen responses (13% of the entire response set) with a Kappa = 0.88 ($p < .001$). After reliability tests, the remaining 87 college attitude responses were coded. Four responses were deemed to have no clear, identifiable code. The majority of responses were labeled as good/positive (47.1%); however, the responses that deemed college as necessary/planned were categorized separately. Those responses represented 19.5% of the total responses. Therefore, while approximately half of the responses carried good/positive attitudes toward college, only about 20% expressly stated college was

necessary and in their future. Approximately 18% of the responses stated attitudes about not attending college, which were interpreted as negative. These responses revealed that students either did not care about college and believed they could be successful in other ways (8.0%) or that college was just not for everyone (10.3%). Other reported attitudes toward college were the desire to be independent/free (5.7%) and nervous/anxious (4.6%).

Table 13. Reported Attitudes Toward College of Survey Participants.

Attitude	Frequency
No clear attitude	4.6% n = 4
Necessary/planned to go	19.5% n = 17
Good/positive	47.1% n = 41
Didn't care about college/believed they could be successful other ways	8.0% n = 7
Not for everyone	10.3% n = 9
Desire to be independent/free	5.7% n = 5
Nervous/anxious	4.6% n = 4
Total	N = 87

Since the survey participants were currently attending college, their motivation for being in college was also assessed as a final measure of college attitudes. Two raters coded 12 responses (12%) randomly chosen from the entire response set in order to establish interrater reliability ($Kappa = 0.69$; $p < .001$). Once reliability was established,

the remaining 89 college attitude responses were coded. Family (24.7%) and a better life (23.6%) were the two motivations most often mentioned. The desire to achieve/succeed and a career also motivated many of the participants, both representing 16.9% of the sample. The full results for college motivation can be found in Table 14.

Table 14. Reported Motivations for College of Survey Participants.

Motivation	Frequency
Love of learning	6.7% n = 6
Family	24.7% n = 22
Desire to succeed/achieve	16.9% n = 15
Better life	23.6% n = 21
Always the plan	5.6% n = 5
Career	16.9% n = 15
Monetary Reasons	2.2% n = 2
Social Aspects	3.4% n = 3
Total	N = 89

Discussion

The purpose of this research was to investigate the college attitudes and preparedness of eighth grade students in the Memphis City School system and MCS high school graduates currently enrolled in college. The goals were two-fold: 1) to assess the academic performance of current MCS students and how it translates to college readiness, as well as determine the college attitudes of MCS students through their reported educational plans, and 2) to retrospectively explore the high school experiences,

attitudes toward college, and amount of college preparation received by MCS graduates who now attend college. Analyses of the EXPLORE test scores of 8th grade students and the responses of current Memphis area college students on the College Attitudes and Preparedness survey provide answers to the initial research questions proposed, in addition to a better understanding of the educational experiences of a Memphis City School student.

EXPLORE

The overall finding from the EXPLORE dataset was that Memphis City School 8th grade students are, on average, not meeting the college readiness benchmarks. According to the ACT, achieving the benchmark score means that the individual has a 50% chance of making an A or B in the corresponding first-year college course. Therefore, the majority of 8th grade students in MCS are already lagging behind academically. Low standardized test results are not new to MCS school personnel; however, they are still disappointing. Despite the recent focus on college readiness and preparation, eighth grade students in general, and especially those who are African American and Hispanic/Latino, continue to achieve well below the national average.

As discussed earlier, the city of Memphis and its school system is predominantly African American, a fact that plays an extremely important role in the interpretation of these findings. Approximately 86% of the students who took the EXPLORE test are African American. The fact that this ethnic group represents such a large majority of the Memphis school population would not be an issue if all of the ethnic groups averaged similar test scores. Unfortunately, that is not the case. The test scores of most African Americans and Hispanic/Latinos in MCS fall below the College Readiness benchmark

scores, whereas Caucasians and Asian Americans consistently score higher. Memphis City Schools are one of many school districts across the nation that struggle with test score differences between racial/ethnic groups, each with varying degrees of severity, but all following the same basic direction. The academic achievement disparity between Caucasians and African Americans has been well documented, but an explanation for the complexity of its existence continues to elude researchers. Most often it is explained as a result of one or more of the following: poverty, low teacher expectations and preparation, low parent participation, racially divided schools, and culturally disconnected curriculum (Irvine & Irvine, 1995), some of which can be identified as existing in the Memphis City School system. In terms of the college choice models proposed by Hossler and Gallagher (1987) and Freeman (2005), African American and Hispanic/Latino students show low academic ability on the EXPLORE test which weakens the link between “Student Characteristics” and “College Predisposition/Predetermination”. While the two models place “Student Characteristics” at different stages, this variable includes academic aptitude, inevitably affecting a student’s ability to attend college

Letter grades are the most tangible report of a student’s performance in school, but there is a likelihood that these grades might not always reflect subject mastery or academic readiness. Using the benchmark scores as a measure of future college grades, I found that students who reported A’s and B’s in their eighth grade classes do not always reach the benchmark score. In other words, those who make the best grades earn the highest scores in each subject, overall, though they are still below the benchmarks. This may be especially troubling to students who believe they are top students, only to realize later on in high school and possibly college that they are not prepared for the coursework.

In summary, students who report the highest grades relative to their peers should be performing at or near (if not above) college benchmarks. However, it should be noted the students' grades are self-reported, so there is a possibility that students inflated their grades.

While the overall findings from the EXPLORE results indicate that the majority of MCS eighth grade students are not performing at the required academic level to be successful in college, the students' post-high school educational aspirations do not reflect that disparity. Only 1.9% of the entire sample believed they would either not graduate from high school or end their educational career with a high school diploma. The percentage of eighth graders who plan to attend a 4-year university or graduate/professional school was 80.5%. These college plans and attitudes closely parallel those found by Etz, Figari, & Linden (2007), validating their survey data of the same nature. Therefore, we can conclude that before entering high school, an overwhelming majority of MCS students aspire to go to college. However, many of these students might not fully understand what higher education, especially at the graduate and professional level, entails, a fact that must be taken into consideration when explaining these results. As these students progress through high school, the academic and financial realities of college become more apparent and might discourage students regarding college. It is not that they do not want to go to college, but that for whatever reason, they do not feel ready to tackle the challenge of college at this point. In this situation, the three intervening variables on the college choice model of Hossler and Gallagher (1987) might have decreased an individual's predisposition to college. If this lack of confidence is derived from personal or financial issues, an individual has every right to postpone or

decide against college altogether. A four-year college might not fit into the career goals of some students when they reach high school graduation. However, if students want to attend a 4-year college, but feel they must forego it as a result of being academically unprepared, then a problem exists for both the schools and the community.

While the majority of participants reported plans to receive some form of job training, or to attend a 2-year, 4 year, or graduate university, there were significant differences between races. African Americans and Caucasians actually share similar rates of educational aspirations, meaning the percentage of each group planning on obtaining a certain level of education is about the same, whereas there were some interesting variations among Hispanic/Latinos and Asian Americans and their educational plans. Hispanic/Latino students actually report higher percentages when it comes to not graduating, stopping with high school diploma, and job training/some college/associate's degree, while a lower percentage of them want to earn a bachelor's degree or higher. Several explanations are plausible. Hispanic/Latinos might have a less optimistic view of their educational future caused by sociocultural expectations of family and financial responsibilities (Kao & Tienda, 1998); on the other hand, they might lack confidence in their ability to attend a four-year college. Attinasi (1989) stated that Mexican Americans are more prevalent in low-paying, blue-collar jobs and less prevalent in high-income, professional jobs compared to the general U.S. population. This fact may affect the educational plans of Mexican American students since the education of parents plays a large role in how students view higher education.

Asian American students have a much different pattern of post high-school plans compared to the other racial/ethnic groups. However, they are a much smaller sample (n

= 178) compared to the other racial groups, so their significant differences might be harder to interpret. In terms of college, out of all the racial/ethnic groups, they report the lowest percentage of attending a career/technical school or community college, but the highest percentage of plans for a 4-year university or more. The educational plans of Asian American students could be due to their culture's strong emphasis from an early age on the importance of education (Chao, 1994). Freeman's incorporation of "Family and Kinship" into the predetermination phase of her model can be applied to Asian American students who often face high expectations from their parents, which results in so many making plans to attend college.

Since so many of the participants reported they plan to attend college, but the majority of sample scored below the benchmark scores, the relationship between these two variables was examined. Analyses showed that students who planned to go to a 4-year college had higher English and Math test scores than students who planned on going to a career/technical school or community college. Even though students with high educational aspirations have higher scores than those with lower educational aspirations, their scores might not be high enough for them to succeed in college.

Furthermore, Caucasians and Asian Americans who planned to obtain a bachelor's degree or higher averaged English test scores of about 16, well above its benchmark score of 13. For Math, Caucasians averaged test scores of about 16, and Asian Americans averaged about 18. With the Math benchmark set at 17, Asian Americans meet it while Caucasians do not. However, the English and Math test scores of African American and Hispanic/Latino students depict a much different level of academic preparedness, even though they all share the same goal of attending a four-year college or

higher. African American and Hispanic/Latino participants averaged a score of approximately 12 on the English section and a 13 on the Math section. As mentioned previously, students as a whole performed better on the English section, which can be seen in African American and Hispanic/Latino students scoring only slightly lower than the English benchmark score of 13. Unfortunately, their average score of 13 on the Math is four points lower than the benchmark score and three to five points lower than their Caucasian and Asian American peers.

The English curriculum and instruction is approaching success for these MCS students, but the majority of students need much more intensive instruction in the area of Math. It is interesting to see that students who share the same educational plans of attending a four-year university face such large disparities in their academic abilities (as established by the EXPLORE test), specifically along racial lines. . The attitude-achievement paradox identified by Mickelson (1990) appears to be present in the Memphis City School system. The students, who are majority African American, hold extremely positive attitudes toward college, but are not performing at the level they need to be to reach their goals of college. At this point, they hold the abstract educational attitudes of society. As these students continue their education and experience the culture that surrounds them, the concrete attitudes they develop will help explain their continued poor academic performance and eventual low college enrollment. Memphis City School students are infinitely aware that college is important, but the environment and culture they live in might not depict that higher education will pay off.

The final set of EXPLORE analyses expanded on the relationship between race/ethnicity and test scores by adding mother's education level as a second independent

variable. Unfortunately, about a third of the sample did not know their mother's highest level of education and even more, close to half of the sample did not know their father's highest level of education. The lack of knowledge about the father's educational attainment could be due to the large number of students who live in households with no father present. The ACS (2008) estimated that in Memphis roughly 52% of children under the age of 18 live in a household where the father/husband figure is absent. Mother's education was used in the analysis since more participants could identify their mother's education level, possibly indicating a stronger presence and influence of the mother on the participants' educational aspirations.

Consistent with previous research, the EXPLORE data showed that students had higher test scores when their parents had more education (Hamrick & Stage, 2004; Freeman, 2005). Higher education improves a parent's cultural capital, which includes income and social class. Cultural capital affords children opportunities to attend better schools with more resources, and at the minimum, instills in them educational expectations of their own (Lareau, 1989). Even with the benefits of higher education levels, a race/ethnicity difference in composite score was found at each level of the mother's education. Caucasians and Asian Americans scored much higher than African Americans and Hispanic/Latinos regardless of their mother's education level. This finding coincides with the race disparities among the EXPLORE benchmark scores. This also may be further proof of the existence of cultural capital within racial/ethnic groups and the impact it has on academic performance, as explained above. For African American and Hispanic/Latino students, if the mother was reported to have obtained a bachelor's degree or higher compared to not completing high school, the students'

composite scores improve only slightly. The fact that African-American and Hispanic/Latino students who have parents with a college education still perform lower than Caucasian and Asian American students is an interesting finding, considering the research on cultural capital. Perhaps African American and Hispanic/Latino students see their college-educated mothers struggling to find a job or provide for their families, and they see the job ceiling that is encountered frequently by minorities despite their level of education. This in turn affects the students' performance in school and decision to attend college (Ogbu, 1978; Mickelson, 1990).

The most prominent finding from the present analyses of the EXPLORE test is the pronounced difference in academic achievement between Caucasian and Asian Americans and African Americans and Hispanics/Latinos. There is a clear achievement disparity between the racial/ethnic groups, and the EXPLORE results show us that these low scores put the students at risk for continued poor performance in high school and college. Further complicating the issue is the overwhelming number of 8th grade students who plan to attend some form of college, but at the same time, are not at the appropriate academic level to achieve this goal. In order to address the irregular relationship of positive college attitudes and low academic achievement, even more emphasis must be put on education, so MCS students have the academic preparation for college.

EXPLORE Limitations

While the EXPLORE results provide us considerable information about education in the Memphis City Schools, they are not without limitations. First of all, the drawbacks of standardized testing should be addressed. High performance on such a test is a combination of knowledge and motivation. Even if the students know the material, their

scores may not reflect that due to their lack of motivation to finish or do well on the test. Also, the EXPLORE test was developed by an external organization to be used by schools all over the nation, so it might not match up with the curriculum being taught in the Memphis City Schools. This assessment allows us to see how 8th grade students in the MCS compare to those across the country, but if the material is something the students have never encountered, it becomes difficult to separate a student's academic ability from lack of instruction.

Another limitation of using the EXPLORE data is that I lack the longitudinal data that would allow me to further assess the students' performance in high school and enrollment in college. Without knowing the outcomes of these students, there is no way to measure the accuracy of my predictions based on the EXPLORE results. The survey data I collected attempts to account for high school experience and college preparation of MCS students, but those participants are much older than the EXPLORE participants, so the two groups cannot be linked for analysis. While the use of the PLAN or ACT test might assess MCS high school students' academic ability and future plans more accurately, the EXPLORE data was used to gain an understanding of what goes on before students enter high school. Information at this point in a student's education begins to necessitate the implementation of academic support systems that would help students prepare and gain access to college. Eventually incorporating analyses of students' performance and responses on the PLAN and ACT would provide longitudinal results and enrich understanding of the EXPLORE data.

Lastly, working with an extremely large, standardized dataset (>14,000 students) is not without its challenges. One problem was that one race (African American)

represented 85% of the sample and the other three racial/ethnic groups represented smaller portions of the sample. While this parallels the demographics of the MCS, it complicates analyses that rely on equal groupings. Another limitation of the data was the large number of categorical variables. Almost all of the variables other than the subject test scores were categorical in nature, limiting the number and type of analyses that could be performed. Additional demographic variables, such as SES and parents' occupation, would have also been beneficial to this study, allowing more in-depth analyses.

CAP Survey

While the EXPLORE assessment provided measures of the academic performance and educational aspirations of MCS eighth grade students, the College Attitudes and Preparedness Survey offered another perspective on how MCS students felt about college. By surveying college students about their MCS experience, a plethora of retrospective information was gained involving the institutional and personal factors that might affect MCS students' decision to attend or not attend college. Insight into the high school experience of the MCS students surveyed serves as the first piece of the puzzle in investigating their college attitudes and preparedness.

For a school system that is described so often as failing, the survey respondents' description of their overall high school experience contradicted that perspective. The majority of the sample thought their experience was "good". These students seemed satisfied with high school, which might be a result of the fact they have graduated and are now attending college. Students who did not graduate high school or chose not to attend college might have a different view of their high school experience, so this finding cannot be generalized. While there were quite a few subjects who described their experience as

“excellent”, only two reported a “poor” experience. Whether they actually had a good experience or are simply choosing to remember high school that way, the survey participants made it clear that their MCS high school experience was, for the most part, a positive one. So what might have contributed to the survey participants’ good experience in their Memphis City high school? What was the school doing right? These questions were answered through participants’ ratings of various features of the high school experience, as well as through their responses to what they liked about their high school.

For the most part, survey respondents rated each component of their high school experience as “excellent” or “good”. Extracurricular activities received the most ratings of “excellent” and “good”. Academics and Social Life were also rated highly, indicating that many students thought they were receiving a quality education while also maintaining the social aspect of high school life. The categories receiving lower ratings were Teachers, College/career Counseling, and Motivated Students. While they received a majority of high ratings, they also received the highest number of “decent” and “poor” ratings out of all of the other categories. Close to half of the participants thought the college/career counseling and motivated students at their high school were lacking. While some categories received a broader range of ratings than others, overall, participants had an affirmative view of the various aspects of their high school experience.

The College Attitudes and Preparedness survey provided qualitative data that revealed many of the categories were not mutually exclusive, scoring high in both “Likes” and “Dislikes”. For example, Faculty/Staff were “liked” more than any other category, but also the third most “disliked” category. Obviously, the relationship between faculty/staff and students is seen to be very important here and can largely

impact how students perceive their high school experience and education. Quality teachers, administrators, and counselors who are invested in their students' education can ultimately lead them to better and brighter futures. Teachers and administrators are often to blame for students' low academic performance, but the fact that MCS faculty/staff was "liked" the most indicates that many of these personnel are influencing students positively. It is possible that these teachers and administrators have good relationships with their students, but the quality or quantity of the teaching may not be sufficient.

Student body/environment was another category mentioned frequently in both the "like" and "dislike" responses. Actual responses falling under this category were "students were friendly", "the close knit student body", "people acted immature", and "dangerous environment". There were twice as many dislike responses than like responses for the student body/environment category, indicating that while many participants liked the students and environment of their high school, even more disliked it. Based on the individual responses, it is apparent that the large amount of violence, gangs, and crime contributed to student body/environment receiving the most dislike responses. Eradicating the violence and fear that create this negative school environment could be a step toward raising academic achievement and promoting higher education in the Memphis City Schools (Solberg, Carlstrom, Howard, & Jones, 2007).

In addition to student body/environment and teachers, the discipline/structure/rules of the respondents' high school were mentioned frequently as a dislike. Things like "disciplinary paddling", "unannounced metal detector checks", and "the uniform policy" are actual examples of the discipline and policies students did not like about their high school. Memphis City Schools have struggled with disciplinary

issues for many years, as have most large urban districts. In 2005-2006, the MCS School Board implemented the Blue Ribbon Plan. According to the MCS website (MCS, n.d.), “The Blue Ribbon Plan was created to promote academic achievement and positive student behavior. The plan takes a proactive rather than reactive approach to soliciting positive student behaviors.” The actual policies are evident in the Student Code Of Conduct Handbook, which outlines the system’s rules and policies regarding student behavior, infractions, and consequences (MCS, 2008). In light of the participants’ comments on the CAP, though, it is possible these policies are not fully implemented or that they are not perceived by students as fair or effective.

Once a student has decided to attend college, a whole new set of challenges await as he/she embarks on the college application process. First, the decision of how many colleges to apply to must be made. Of the CAP survey respondents who applied to colleges other than the one they currently attend, about half of the sample applied to 2-3 colleges, a quarter applied to 4-5 schools, and the remaining participants (22.5%) applied to 6 or more schools. The fact that most of the sample applied to more than one college reflects a positive attitude toward college and a desire to find the college that will best fulfill the individual’s needs. It was found that participants from College 1, the private, liberal arts college, applied to more colleges than participants from College 2 and 3. This could be explained in a variety of ways, but for the purpose of this paper, shows that students from Memphis area colleges differ in the way they approached the college choice process. Even though some of the survey respondents applied to more colleges than others, more than one college application indicates that these students, and hopefully

many others, were interested in getting the best education, not just the one that is most convenient.

After the list of colleges to apply to is compiled, the next step is filling out the applications, an often daunting task. Overwhelmed with transcripts, personal statements, and financial aid, most students need help with their college applications. The person reported most often as helping survey respondents with their college applications was the mother, which is understandable considering the mother is most likely the person willing to help with the process. Teachers and guidance counselors were also frequently mentioned as helping students with their applications, but not as often as one might expect. While teachers and counselors have many other responsibilities, they should be the first person a student turns to when they need help with their college applications because they have experience and knowledge of the process. An increase in application help from the school might give more students an increased likelihood of completing the application process.

Echoing the sentiment of more application assistance, the survey participants reported the availability of a variety of college preparatory activities at their high school and whether the participants personally participated in these activities. The results are surprising. The respondents reported that most of them had Honors/AP classes and SAT/ACT prep offered to them and that 78% and 87%, respectively, of the participants took advantage of these activities. College counseling, college visits, and application/financial aid help were less reported as being available at the respondents' high school. However, the majority of those who had them, participated in them. While

the high rates of availability and participation are encouraging, there must be more of both in order to give more MCS students a chance to attend and succeed in college.

While many of the survey participants reported that their high school offered college preparatory activities and that they participated in these activities, did these activities increase the participants' feelings of college preparedness? The majority of participants felt "somewhat prepared" after graduation high school and upon entering college. Only six participants did not feel prepared at all. These results could be interpreted many ways. On one hand, the fact that 73.3% of the participants felt at least somewhat prepared for college indicates that many students are receiving the education and preparation they feel is necessary for college. However, that leaves 27.7% of the participants who felt only "a little" or "not" prepared for college, a large number for a school district that wants every child to be college bound. Furthermore, the CAP survey was administered to students who are in college. MCS students who are not currently in college might have more feelings of unpreparedness, which could have contributed to their decision to forego college. The majority of survey participants made it clear that they thought their Memphis City high school could do more to prepare their students for college, regardless of whether they felt very prepared or not prepared.

In addition to simply asking the survey participants how prepared they felt for college, they were also asked to report their college grades, providing a more tangible measure of academic preparedness. Most of the participants selected "mostly B's" which is not unexpected for this type of question. No one reported making "mostly D's" and only one person stated they made "mostly F's". This could imply that MCS are preparing their students to do well in college and it is just a matter of encouraging the students to

apply and enroll in college. However, the question is reliant on self-report, meaning there is a chance that the respondent exaggerated or inflated their grades. Nevertheless, it is a promising finding.

The final piece of my research comes from three open-ended questions asking participants about their personal journey towards college, including obstacles, attitudes, and motivation. One surprising finding from the obstacles to college responses was that more than 50% of the participants stated that they had no obstacles. The question had been included in the survey with the understanding that most people had some sort of obstacle that must be overcome to go to college. However, it seems that either the participants did not see their obstacles as appropriate to disclose on the survey, that their obstacles did not apply to the question, or they honestly did not have any. Finances was the most frequently mentioned obstacle, unsurprising since college can be expensive and many MCS students do not believe they have the money to go or the ability to attain scholarships and financial aid. Academic unpreparedness paired with low grades was also an obstacle for many MCS students. While academic preparedness/low grades could be due to the students' own oversight, it could also be a reflection of the high school education they received. Going along with that, a lack of guidance with the college application process is also mentioned as an obstacle to college, which could be corrected with increased assistance from teachers and guidance counselors. Based on the responses of the participants, it seems that the majority of the obstacles mentioned could be avoided if Memphis City high schools provided college and financial aid application assistance for all students. Those who feel they don't have the money for college would have access to a knowledgeable, committed adult who could help them figure out what it would take

for them to attend college and would work with them to obtain necessary funding. These “mentors” could also give advice, edit personal essays, and keep students motivated during the application process.

Up until now in my research, college attitude has been measured by the educational aspirations of MCS 8th grade students and implied in certain findings from the CAP survey. However, college attitude can also be measured through the survey responses obtained from the open-ended question inquiring about the attitudes toward college the participants remembered hearing when they were in high school. The overriding attitude toward college was found to be a good/positive one. Even more responses stated that going to college was not just a good thing, but necessary and that the participant and their peers all planned to attend. These responses contributed to approximately 66% of responses stating attitudes of college being wanted and needed. There were several responses that reflected an attitude that college was not for everyone and people could be successful without it. This attitude is not a new one and has been heard from both students and adults who believe MCS are putting too much of a focus on sending students to college rather than preparing them for the future that is right for them. Nonetheless, the retrospective college attitudes of the survey participants provide further support for my investigation of MCS students’ feelings about college. It seems that the positive attitude toward college seen in the educational aspirations of MCS 8th grade students remains present throughout high school, but may not always translate into college.

In order to overcome obstacles and negative attitudes about college, students must be motivated to attend college or it is unlikely they will. When survey participants were

asked what motivated them to attend college, the majority claimed that family and the chance at a better life were what motivated them. Family included both parents and children, as some of the participants were parents themselves and wanted to be able to provide for their child. Also mentioned quite frequently as motivation to go to college was the desire to succeed/achieve and to have a career. It should be noted that all the aforementioned motivators are extrinsic in nature. The desire to succeed/achieve could be considered both intrinsic and extrinsic since the need to achieve is internal, but often motivated by external sources. The only true intrinsic motivator reported was a love of learning, which was mentioned only six times. The motivation responses indicate that MCS college students have a variety of motivations that lead to their enrollment and perseverance in college.

Overall, the College Attitudes and Preparedness (CAP) Survey provided a plethora of information on the high school experience, college preparation, obstacles and motivation for college of many past MCS students. The majority of participants had a good experience in their high school, felt at least somewhat prepared for college and are making average grades in their college classes. However, many participants reported not liking the student body/environment of their high school and needing more college counseling, as well as application and financial aid help. Even participants who felt very prepared for college felt their high school could have done more to prepare its students for college, emphasizing a constant need for more experience. The attitudes toward college responses indicate that MCS high school students still view college positively and even a necessary part of their future.

CAP Survey Limitations

While a lot of important information about the Memphis City Schools was gained from the CAP survey, there are several implications and limitations to the survey and its results. Most importantly to note is the use of a convenience sample. While participation was voluntary, I was limited in how I could distribute my survey, which limited the variety and number of participants I could obtain. Therefore, the responses and opinions gained from the survey cannot be generalized to all Memphis City School students. The participants of the survey also should be addressed. The majority of the survey respondents were African American, female, and in their first year of college. More representation from other racial/ethnic groups and males would give the survey findings more validity. Lastly, the variety of survey administration could have also affected my results. Due to institutional and time constraints, I was forced to conform to administration methods that would allow me to obtain the most responses in the allotted time. There was little flexibility in the way the survey could be administered at each college as their research subject pools are set up differently and the needs for this research were rather specific. While the survey administration method was slightly different at each institution, the survey content and questions remained the same, providing confidence that this implication had little effect on my outcomes.

Future Research

Although there are many limitations to my survey, the results obtained open the door for more research to be done on the college attitudes and preparedness of Memphis City School students. By simply administering the survey to more students at each college, the issues dealing with sample size and type would most likely be corrected, and

more responses could contribute to an even better understanding of MCS students experience in high school and college. Another possibility for future research would be to adapt the survey for administration to MCS students who are not enrolled in college or who enrolled in college initially, but had to drop out. Their views and attitudes would provide better insight into why students choose not to attend college. To truly tie the EXPLORE results and the CAP survey results together, current MCS high schools students need to be surveyed to investigate their college attitudes and preparedness. A longitudinal study using a sample of MCS students would also increase our knowledge of how students are learning and preparing for college. This kind of study should begin in elementary school and track a sample of students at various MCS schools as they progress to middle school, high school, and hopefully college graduation. It would examine the specific influence of SES, family, school, and peers on a student's educational trajectory. Using longitudinal data would be the best method of assessing the impact of the school system, the school, and an individual's culture on a student's academic performance and future.

This research began with the belief that Memphis City School students possess positive attitudes toward college, but these attitudes are not strong enough on their own to get students to apply to college. There are a multitude of factors that influence a student's decision to attend college (Hossler & Gallagher, 1987; Freeman, 2005), many of which were found to be present in my research. However, it is most apparent that a lack of college preparedness, both academically and mentally, keeps many MCS students from attending college. Without the appropriate level of academic ability and the support and assistance to apply and plan for college, students are unlikely to enroll despite the

positive attitudes they hold. The attitude-achievement paradox presented by Mickelson (1990) continues to be perpetuated in the Memphis City Schools. In both the EXPLORE data and the College Attitudes and Preparedness Survey, participants possessed abstract attitudes toward college. The vast majority of participants from the EXPLORE test planned to attend a 4-year college and a large percentage of the CAP survey respondents viewed college as positive and necessary, depicting the underlying belief that education leads to opportunity. On the other hand, the existence of concrete realities was also discovered through both research instruments. These are shown in the low percentage of MCS students, especially minority students, meeting EXPLORE College Readiness benchmarks and the expressed need for more college preparation and counseling in the CAP survey. External from this research, but an overarching concrete reality, is the 62% percent MCS graduation rate. Rather than trying to find someone or something in the school system that is at fault for these realities, administrators and teachers need to start building a solid foundation for learning early in a child's education in hopes of one day closing the achievement disparity between majority and minority groups.

Based on the findings of this research, there are several policy changes Memphis City Schools could look into implementing in order to keep moving their students toward success in their educational aspirations. First, the disparity between academic performance between racial/ethnic groups should be addressed by fostering a sense of understanding and awareness of their existence. Individuals at all levels of the educational system – teachers, administrators, students, parents, community members -- should be involved in conversations about the problems that reside in the schools and their recommendations to correct them. These disparities should not be tolerated any

longer. They are not due to differences in funding, but more systemic in nature. In order to combat them, interventions should happen on a number of fronts, such as school nutrition, books in the home, more afterschool tutoring, extended school hours, or higher expectations. Schools might also benefit from decreasing class size, much like charter schools have experimented with, to help teachers manage and assist their students on a more personal level.

In addition to focusing on academic disparities, more programs and services should be implemented to aid students in college preparation and the application process. The importance of higher education should be mentioned to students at a young age, so by the time they reach high school, they have the academic ability to take part in college preparatory activities and eventually be successful in college. Survey participants provided a myriad of suggestions regarding what MCS could do better to prepare and encourage their students to attend college, indicating that solutions could be out there if the school district starts to listen. While there is no immediate fix to the problems Memphis City Schools face, it is the hope that this research brings some light and a different perspective on the situation and promotes positive changes that will eventually lead to more MCS students succeeding in both high school and college.

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Appendix A
College Attitudes and Preparation Survey

Please circle your answer for Questions 3-6.

1. What high school did you attend?

Name: _____

City, State: _____

2. What year did you graduate from high school?

3. Gender?

Male

Female

I prefer not to respond

4. Ethnicity?

African American White

American Indian

Mexican American/Chicano

Asian American/Pacific Islander

Puerto Rican, Cuban, other Hispanic

Multiracial

Other

I prefer not to respond

5. Do you attend this college full-time or part-time?

Full-time

Part-time

6. How many years have you been in college?

1

2

3

4

5 or more

7. What is your major or intended field of study?

8. How would you describe your overall high school experience?

Great Good Decent Poor

Please expand on your answer if you would like:

9. Please list up to 3 things you liked about the high school from which you graduated.

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

10. Please list up to 3 things that you did not like about the high school from which you graduated.

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

11. How would you rate your high school on the following categories?

(Please circle one answer for each row)

Academics:	Excellent	Good	Decent	Poor
Teachers:	Excellent	Good	Decent	Poor
College/Career Counseling:	Excellent	Good	Decent	Poor
Motivated Students:	Excellent	Good	Decent	Poor
Extracurricular Activities:	Excellent	Good	Decent	Poor
Social Life:	Excellent	Good	Decent	Poor

12. What kinds of things did your high school offer to prepare you for college and which ones did you participate in? Mark all that apply.

	<u>Available at HS</u>	<u>Participated in</u>
Honors/AP Classes	_____	_____
SAT/ACT prep	_____	_____
College Counseling	_____	_____
College Visits	_____	_____
Help with Application & Financial Aid	_____	_____

13. Could your high school have done more to prepare students for college?

Yes

No

If yes, please explain.

14. Please circle all the people who helped you with the college application process.

Mother Father Sibling Friend Teacher Guidance Counselor

Other (please specify): _____

15. Overall, how prepared for college did you feel upon graduating high school/enrolling in college?

Very Prepared

Somewhat Prepared

A Little Prepared

Not Prepared

16. What were the obstacles that made it difficult to go to college? Any specific to the high school you attended?

17. How did the students at your high school view college? What kinds of attitudes toward college do you remember hearing or experiencing?

18. What motivated you to go to college?

19. Was the college you selected and now attend the only one to which you applied?

Yes No

If no, how many colleges/universities did you apply to?

2-3 4-5 6 or more

20. Why did you choose the college that you now attend? Circle all that apply.

Academic Program(s)

Financial Aid

Location

Students

Faculty

Other: _____

21. What are the majority of your grades in your college-level classes?

Mostly A's Mostly B's Mostly C's Mostly D's Mostly F's

22. Have you always planned on attending college?

Yes No

If no, what changed your mind?

23. In general, what could your high school/school system do better to prepare and encourage their students to attend college?

Appendix B
Coding Manuals

Likes and Dislikes

- 1 Academics
 - 2 Faculty/Staff
 - 3 Diversity
 - 4 Arts
 - 5 AP/Honors
 - 6 Social Activities/Extracurriculars
 - 7 Athletics
 - 8 Discipline/Structure/Rules
 - 9 Service Opportunities
 - 10 School Facilities/Location
 - 11 Student Body/Environment
 - 12 Friends
 - 13 Diff. in academic care/Discrimination
 - 14 College info/guidance
-

Obstacles

- 0 None
 - 1 Finances
 - 2 Academic unpreparedness/low grades
 - 3 Lack of motivation
 - 4 Family Obligations
 - 5 Low morale/expectations
 - 6 Lack of guidance with application
process
 - 7 Social/Peer pressure
-

Motivation

- 1 Love of Learning
 - 2 Family
 - 3 Desire to succeed/achieve
 - 4 Better life
 - 5 Always the plan
 - 6 Career
 - 7 Monetary Reasons
 - 8 Social Aspects
-

Attitudes

- 1 Necessary/planned to go
 - 2 Good/positive
 - 3 Didn't care about college/believed they could be successful other ways
 - 4 Not for everyone
 - 5 Desire to be independent/free
 - 6 Nervous/anxious
 - 0 No clear attitude
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