Our Voices Heard: Factors Contributing to the Recruitment and Retention of High School Students of Color in After-school Programs

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Our Voices Heard: Factors Contributing to the Recruitment and Retention of High School Students of Color in After-school Programs

Abstract
Research indicates that education is a key to both economic growth and higher living standards for American citizens. However, it is challenging for high school students of color living in urban neighborhoods to obtain high-quality education. Extant research indicates that after-school programs serving students of color play a critical role in bridging the achievement gap in education. Unfortunately, in designing and marketing these vital programs, the voices of the most informed, the students, are often overlooked as a source of information. Students can contribute a valuable perspective on after-school programming. This study identified factors that contribute to recruitment and retention in afterschool programs serving high school students of color. This interpretive qualitative research study collected focus group data (n=28) from high school students of color attending three urban high schools in the New York City area. The participants were asked to describe the program, to explain why they joined the program and why they stayed, and to talk about possible barriers to participation. After each focus group session, the participants submitted a writing sample explaining what would be their ideal after-school program. The focus group data was analyzed to identify factors that needed to be considered when examining the success of recruitment and retention of students of color. The five major concepts emerged from the analysis, which were: marketing, incentives, development of youth, activities/services, and social connectedness. MIDAS is a conceptual model that was proposed as an approach for the successful recruitment and retention of high school students of color in after-school programs. Additionally, this dissertation discussed the implications and recommendations for practitioner and policymakers.

(Keywords: after-school programs, recruitment, retention, students of color, high school students)
Our Voices Heard: Factors Contributing to the Recruitment and Retention of High School Students of Color in After-school Programs

By
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Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree Ed.D. in Executive Leadership

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St. John Fisher College

August 2011
Dedication

This is dedicated to the Njapa and Minyard families for believing that a quality education is the greatest gift you can give to yourself or to anyone else. *To God be the Glory*
Biographical Sketch

Pamela Njapa-Minyard is the founder and executive director of a nonprofit after-school program that provides leadership training for middle school and high school girls in urban school districts in the New York City area. This nonprofit has provided leadership training and workshops to over 900 young women since 2006. Ms. Njapa-Minyard served as Assistant Provost at Mercy College, overseeing the federal and state funded opportunity programs. Ms. Njapa-Minyard attended William Smith College and graduated with a Bachelor of Science degree in Psychology. She attended Mercy College and graduated with a Master of Science degree in Organizational Leadership. She came to St. John Fisher College and began doctoral studies in the Ed.D. Program in Executive Leadership. Ms. Njapa-Minyard pursued her research in recruitment and retention in after-school programs for high school students of color under the direction of Dr. Jerry Willis and Dr. Pamela Davis and received the Ed.D. degree in 2011.
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Abstract

Research indicates that education is a key to both economic growth and higher living standards for American citizens. However, it is challenging for high school students of color living in urban neighborhoods to obtain high-quality education. Extant research indicates that after-school programs serving students of color play a critical role in bridging the achievement gap in education. Unfortunately, in designing and marketing these vital programs, the voices of the most informed, the students, are often overlooked as a source of information. Students can contribute a valuable perspective on after-school programming.

This study identified factors that contribute to recruitment and retention in after-school programs serving high school students of color. This interpretive qualitative research study collected focus group data (n=28) from high school students of color attending three urban high schools in the New York City area.

The participants were asked to describe the program, to explain why they joined the program and why they stayed, and to talk about possible barriers to participation. After each focus group session, the participants submitted a writing sample explaining what would be their ideal after-school program.

The focus group data was analyzed to identify factors that needed to be considered when examining the success of recruitment and retention of students of color. The five major concepts emerged from the analysis, which were: marketing, incentives, development of youth, activities/services, and social connectedness. MIDAS is a
conceptual model that was proposed as an approach for the successful recruitment and retention of high school students of color in after-school programs. Additionally, this dissertation discussed the implications and recommendations for practitioner and policymakers. (Keywords: after-school programs, recruitment, retention, students of color, high school students)
# Table of Contents

Dedication .......................................................................................................................... ii  
Biographical Sketch ........................................................................................................... iii  
Acknowledgements ............................................................................................................ iv  
Abstract ............................................................................................................................. vi  
Table of Contents ............................................................................................................ viii  
List of Tables .................................................................................................................... xii  
List of Figures .................................................................................................................. xiii  
Chapter 1: Introduction ....................................................................................................... 1  
  Introductory Vignettes .................................................................................................. 1  
  Introduction ................................................................................................................... 3  
  Statement of the Problem .............................................................................................. 8  
  Motivational Theories ................................................................................................... 8  
  Self-Determination Theory .......................................................................................... 9  
  Developmental Systems Theory ................................................................................... 10  
  Culturally Relevant Theory ........................................................................................ 12  
  Significance of the Study .............................................................................................. 13  
  Purpose of the Study .................................................................................................... 15  
  Definitions of Terms .................................................................................................... 15  
  Research Questions ..................................................................................................... 18  
  Summary of Remaining Chapters ............................................................................... 19
Social Connectedness................................................................................................ 100
Factors Contributing to Retention ........................................................................... 103
Marketing.................................................................................................................. 103
Incentives .................................................................................................................. 105
Development of Youth .............................................................................................. 105
Activities and Services .............................................................................................. 107
Social Connectedness .............................................................................................. 108
Factors Hindering Recruitment and Retention ....................................................... 114
Marketing.................................................................................................................. 115
Development of Youth .............................................................................................. 115
Activities and Services .............................................................................................. 116
Social Connectedness .............................................................................................. 117
Summary ................................................................................................................... 118
Chapter 5: Discussion .............................................................................................. 120
Introduction ............................................................................................................ 120
Overview of the Study .............................................................................................. 120
Key Findings ............................................................................................................ 122
MIDAS Model .......................................................................................................... 124
Implications of Findings .......................................................................................... 141
Implications for Theory .......................................................................................... 141
Implications for Practice ......................................................................................... 142
Implications of for Policies ..................................................................................... 144
Significance .............................................................................................................. 146
## List of Tables

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Table 2.1</td>
<td>Findings from Recruitment and Retention Literature</td>
<td>55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 3.1</td>
<td>Framework of Research Study</td>
<td>63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 3.2</td>
<td>Demographics for Adams, Brandeis, Pleasantville High School</td>
<td>68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 3.3</td>
<td>Demographics for Adams High Participants</td>
<td>73</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 3.4</td>
<td>Demographics for Brandeis High Participants</td>
<td>74</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 3.5</td>
<td>Demographics for Pleasantville High Participants</td>
<td>75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 3.6</td>
<td>Strengths of focus groups versus in-depth interviews</td>
<td>77</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 3.7</td>
<td>Phases of Thematic Analysis</td>
<td>83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 4.1</td>
<td>Factors Contributing to Recruitment</td>
<td>102</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 4.2</td>
<td>Factors Contributing to Retention</td>
<td>114</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 4.3</td>
<td>Factors Hindering Recruitment and Retention</td>
<td>118</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
# List of Figures

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Figure 2.1</td>
<td>Rings of Engagement Model</td>
<td>56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 2.2</td>
<td>Ladder of Participation Model</td>
<td>58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 3.1</td>
<td>Sub-themes to marketing concept</td>
<td>85</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 3.2</td>
<td>Sub-themes to incentives concept</td>
<td>86</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 3.3</td>
<td>Sub-themes to development of youth concept</td>
<td>86</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 3.4</td>
<td>Sub-themes to activities and services concept</td>
<td>87</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 3.5</td>
<td>Sub-themes to social connectedness concept</td>
<td>87</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 3.6</td>
<td>Triangulation method</td>
<td>89</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 5.1</td>
<td>MIDAS model</td>
<td>125</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Chapter 1: Introduction

Introductory Vignettes

So many students were outside. It was a beautiful fall day in late September of 2009, and I was on my way to one of the after-school programs I created in February 2006. As I approached the school, I found it overwhelming to see so many students hanging out right outside the school building; this school has many students. The boisterous language of urban youth filled the air with life. However, as soon as I stepped into the school building—dead silence. I was shocked; where are all of the students? This particular school, in which the majority of the student body is Latino and African American, had so much to offer their students after-school. Part of the school’s after-school repertoire included programs such as one-on-one tutoring, drama, arts, photography, robotics, sports, and leadership training, to name a few. Yet, so many students were outside of the school and not engaging in these programs. I signed in at the security station and asked one of the teachers in the building, “Wow, you have so many students; why aren’t they coming to the after-school programs you offer here?” She looked at me with a blank expression and said, “I wish I knew.” “I know why,” a student chimed in while holding the door open for us. “They not coming ‘cause some of the programs are borrr-ring,” she said with a smile. After years of running after-school programs in urban schools, I knew this scenario was typical. I left that day wondering why students are not taking advantage of the free after-school opportunities. (P.N. Njapa-Minyard, researcher reflective notes, September 2009)
The 2:41 club. One day after school in early October, I drove to pick my son up from high school freshman football practice. I noticed many students still around the school grounds. As I entered the building, I saw many more students in the building. This is a private high school and the majority of the student population is Caucasian. As my son loaded his school and sport bags into the trunk, I overheard students talking about the “gaming club.” After our normal after-school car talk, I asked my son, “What do most of the kids in your school do after school?” “Sports mostly,” he answered, but continued, “but we have a lot of activities: the arts club, the gaming club, all sorts of stuff.” “So the students normally go to after-school programs?” I inquired. “Yeah, as a matter of fact if you don’t go, you’re teased. My social studies teacher says those kids are part of the 2:41 club.” “The 2:41 club?” I asked. “Yeah, those are the kids that don’t participate in after-school stuff and go straight home when the bell rings at 2:41pm. No kid wants to be in that club.” (P.N. Njapa-Minyard, researcher reflective notes, October 2009)

Adults don’t always have the answer. I had the opportunity to present my preliminary literature review regarding recruitment and retention at a national conference in Washington, D.C. in July of 2010. Hundreds of practitioners, policy makers, and school administrators from all over the United States gathered to engage in the after-school programming discourse. Approximately 25-30 professionals attended my breakout session. After presenting my review of the literature, I was amazed at the amount of interest during the question and answer period. “This is a huge problem,” a program coordinator stated; “I have a hard time getting the students to come to the program.” She was not alone in her sentiments. “I know,” said a program director (also a
former principal). “We serve a challenging cohort of students, with so many needs…high-needs. I’m at a loss as to what to do.” “Have you asked your students why?” I asked no one in particular. “Oh, we do assessments every year, but our participation rates are still not where they should be,” an assistant director asserted. “Last year we offered an iPod as a prize but nothing changed.” I responded, “No, I do not mean assessments. Have you had a conversation with your students to find out from them? You will be amazed by what they say,” I responded. I continued by talking about an incident that happened to me several months prior. I told the audience about how the students in my after-school program chose “riding horses at a farm” over “meeting a celebrity” as a group activity. I laughed and said, “I, as an adult, would never have thought riding horses was of any interest to a group of African American and Latina teenagers.” My 14-year-old son, who was acting as my A/V technician, quietly stated, “Goes to show you, adults don’t always have the answer” (P.N. Njapa-Minyard, researcher reflective notes, July 2010).

Introduction

Over the years practitioners and policymakers examined why the American public high school, which educated all students in the past, including African American, Latino, and immigrant children, are failing today (Fruchter, 2001). Hochschild (2001) argued that most Americans believed receiving a quality public education could turn the American dream, of boundless opportunities, into reality. However, large achievement gaps by race and socioeconomic status continued to persist in the United States. In fact, Laird, Cataldi, KewalRamani, and Chapman (2008) reported that in the United States, high school dropout rates are higher for most ethnic minority students with lower income
than for nonminority students with higher incomes. According to Aud et al.’s (2011), the dropout rate in 2009 for Hispanics was 17.6% compared to 9.3% for African Americans and 5.2% for Caucasians.

Receiving a high quality education was vital to growing the United States economy and improving the living standards for American citizens (U.S. Department of Education, 2010). Obtaining an education increased productivity and incomes, effected improvements in health, encouraged social change, and enhanced the long-term economic opportunities of children and adults (Hochschild, 2001; Levin, Belfield, Muennig, & Rouse, 2007; U.S. Department of Education, 2010). This “American dream” of receiving a quality education often deferred for students of color. Many students of color did not graduate from high school, or if they did, were underprepared to successfully graduate from college (Aberger, Brown, Mantil, & Perkins, 2009; Heckman & LaFontaine, 2007; KewalRamani, Gilbertson, Fox, & Provasnik, 2007; Lee, Ransom, & Williams, 2011; U.S. Department of Education, 2010).

Because of the academic challenges and the need to have more students positively engaged, schools explored a number of viable resources to help increase graduation and reduce the high school dropout rates (Afterschool Alliance, 2009a). Schools discovered that the productive use of hours after school ensured the success of students by keeping them engaged and preventing them from dropping out (Afterschool Alliance, 2009a). Consequently, high schools begun to have after-school programs in the building that focused on youth development (Halpern, 2002; Marsh & Kleitman, 2002). Research indicated after-school programs’ effectiveness in minimizing the achievement gap and
increasing high school graduation rates (Afterschool Alliance, 2008; Gillard, Watts, & Witt, 2009; Little, 2009).

Moreover, there was a relationship between after-school programs and academic learning outcomes (Little, Wimer, & Weiss, 2008). Besides lowering dropout rates, students in after-school programs performed better academically, which included improved test scores, improved grades, better quality homework assignments submissions, and improved work habits (Little et al., 2008). After-school programs also provided positive youth development in addition to academic supports (Kahne et al., 2001). After-school programs were especially crucial for low-income students who often find themselves in unsafe and unsupervised circumstances after regular school hours (Vandell, Reisner, & Pierce, 2007).

Although high schools offered these after-school opportunities, student participation was tenuous. Despite the established need for after-school academic support, many high school based after-school programs found it difficult to recruit and retain students, especially those from lower socioeconomic backgrounds (Wimer, Bouffard, Caronongan, Dearing, Simpkins, Little, & Weiss, 2006). For instance, in 2009, 17% of elementary school students participated in after-school programs, yet only 12% middle school students and 7% of high school students participated (Afterschool Alliance, 2009c). Unfortunately, once children enter middle school and high school, the rate of participation in after-school programs decreased considerably (Deschenes et al., 2010).

In fact, in the United States in 2009, over 12 million middle school and high school students took care of themselves after school without adult supervision
The time spent without adult supervision was linked to growth in externalizing behavior problems (Pettit, Bates, Dodge, & Meece, 1999). Oddly, the participation rate remained low for older youth (Deschenes et al., 2010) even though many parents and older youth, especially from low-income groups, reported a high demand for quality and accessible programming in high school (Duffett, Johnson, Farkas, Kung, & Ott, 2004).

Because of the low attendance rate of high school students, researchers started to examine ways to engage older youth (Deschenes et al., 2010; Herrera & Arbreton, 2003; Lauver, 2004). They found several factors that were related to recruitment and retention such as providing leadership opportunities, creating engaging activities that were age appropriate and relevant to the students, and providing unique learning opportunities (Deschenes et al., 2010; Herrera & Arbreton, 2003; Lauver, 2004). There were several barriers, the researchers found, that prevented students from attending after-school programs, such as lacking information about the program and caring for a younger sibling (Kauh, 2010; Wimer et al., 2006). There was, however, limited research on recruitment and retention factors for African American and Latino high school students (Kayitsinga & Villarruel, 2008; Kauh, 2010; Perkins et al., 2009).

The first two introductory vignettes, “So many students were outside” and “The 2:41 club” took place at two different high schools located in the same town in the New York City area. Those reflections corroborated existing research findings that there were significant demographic differences in participation in after-school programs (Little, 2007; Wimer et al., 2006). A historical analysis revealed that the demographic differences in participation rates had not changed since the late 1990s (Harvard Family
Research Project, 2007). Little (2007) argued that race and socioeconomic factors play a role in after-school enrollment and retention and found:

- Higher income youth were more likely to participate in virtually all after-school programs and activities than lower income youth.
- Higher income youth participate in greater frequency than lower income youth.
- Across most after-school programs and activities, White youth are overrepresented, Latino youth are underrepresented, and Black youth are somewhere in between.

Because of the third vignette, “Adults don’t always have the answer”, I examined the students’ perspective regarding after-school programs recruitment and retention practices. Gentilucci (2004) argued that students’ perspective is the key to significant reform in education. Cook-Sather (2002) continued this argument and stated that empowering the students’ voice allowed adults to see the world from the students’ perspective, increased accessibility to student learning, and aided to the conceptualization of effective teaching methods by the teaching staff.

In this study, I analyzed recruitment and retention constructs from the perspective of the highly engaged students attending these after-school programs. I attempted to gain a better understanding of why students enrolled in after-school programs and why they continued participating. I used focus group interviews, student writings, and researcher reflective and field notes as my data sources. In Chapter 1, I introduced the problem statement, identified the significance of the study, stated the purpose, presented the research questions, provided definition of terms, and summarized the remaining chapters.
Statement of the Problem

The problems that the study examined were issues involving recruitment and retention in after-school programs for urban teens. The theoretical and empirical research studies revealed two issues. The first issue, researchers provided evidence that an after-school program provided positive outcomes, especially for low-income urban youth (Fashola, 1998; Mehesy, 2004). Mehesy (2004) emphasized that a low staff-to-student ratio that after-school programs offer more individual academic supports. Thus, classroom teachers attributed gains in reading and mathematics as well as improved work habits and peer relations to lower staff-to-student ratios during after-school sessions because of after-school programs.

The second issue, the problem of this present study, researchers found that after-school programs fail to sustain participation of older youth (Hellison & Wright, 2003). Apsler (2009) stated that lack of sustained participation of the students contributed to the inability to assess and evaluate after-school programs effectiveness. What good is a promising after-school program if there are few or no participants in the room? There is very little in the body of research that directly addressed the issues of recruitment and retention of high school students and even less research on high students of color (Arbreton, Bradshaw, Metz, Sheldon, & Pepper, 2008; Deschenes et al., 2010; Herrera & Arbreton, 2003; Kauh, 2010; Perkins et al., 2009).

Motivational Theories

There were three theoretical perspectives used as guidance for thinking about the ways older youth are motivated to join and remain in after-school programs. Petraitis and Flay (1995) argued that theoretical and conceptual frameworks help organize thoughts
around issues involving youth and “guide the analysis of etiological data” (p.67). Most
studies that examined human motivation suggested factors cannot be strictly extrinsic or
intrinsic (Sichivitsa, 2007). These theories, which included self-determination theory
(Ryan & Deci, 2000) and developmental systems theory (Lerner, 2005) were particularly
useful in understanding how the students are motivated to join and sustain engagement in
the after-school context. In addition, these theories were beneficial in interpreting the
youths’ perceptions during data analysis. Because the participants were students of color,
and culture and ethnicity was a factor, I also reviewed cultural relevancy theory (Ladson-

**Self-Determination Theory**

Ryan and Deci (2000) developed self-determination theory (SDT) in an attempt to
explain how humans are motivated. The three tenets of this theory were (a) humans were
active beings, (b) humans naturally pursued growth and development, and (c) humans
possessed three universal psychological needs (Ryan & Deci, 2000). Because of the
tenets, SDT involved motivation by meeting the three psychological needs. SDT
purposed that motivation passes through a continuum from amotivation to extrinsic
motivation to intrinsic motivation. Not only are positive environmental factors important
to motivation, those factors, when integrated into the self, results in intrinsic motivation
(Ryan & Deci, 2000).

In order to reach optimal motivation (intrinsic) in SDT, all three needs must met,
which included the need to feel (a) competent, (b) autonomous, and (c) connected to
others (Ryan & Deci, 2000). Students are autonomous when they will devote their time
and energy to a project and competent when they feel able to meet the challenges of that
project (Niemiec & Ryan, 2009). A student who felt competent in an after-school tutoring program but did not feel socially connected to others will eventually lose their motivation to continue (Niemiec & Ryan, 2009). Therefore, in order for students to maintain intrinsic motivation for an after-school program, all three needs must be met or risk disengagement.

According to Ryan and Deci (2000), SDT monitored the nature of positive developmental habits in addition to discover what prevented those positive habits from emerging. Using the SDT framework, helped teachers develop intrinsic motivational habits in students as well as assisted the teachers determine what factors lead to student’s disengagement (Niemiec & Ryan, 2009). SDT furthered the body of knowledge regarding how self-motivation is developed and ways support students’ perceptions of their own competence (Eisenman, 2007).

**Developmental Systems Theory**

Developmental systems theory (DST), based on positive youth development conceptual model, evolved over the years (Balsano et al., 2007). According to DST, youth grew in a series of environments and over the years as the youth developed into an adult, those environments influenced the youth as well as the youth impacted the environment (Lerner, 2005; Lerner et al., 2005). DST examined the systems by which youth interacted and formed meaningful relationships with their environment (adults, peers, and community) to produce developmental outcomes (Dworkin & Larson, 2006). DST was well established in the literature as a theoretical framework for helping youth engage (Benson et al., 2006; Damon, 2004; Gardner, Roth, & Brooks-Gunn, 2008; Larson, 2006; Larson & Walker, 2005; Restuccia & Bundy, 2003; Sullivan, 2011).
Konopka, one of the pioneers of DST in positive youth development in the late 1970s, theorized that youth motivation and engagement happens when adhering to eight requirements:

- feeling safe in a structured environment
- feeling as a member of a group and having a sense of belonging
- contributing meaningful and developing self-worth
- gaining independence by self-discovery and controlling over one's life
- developing quality relationships with at least one adult and peers
- discussing conflicting values and formulation of their own value system
- feeling pride of aptitude and mastery
- expanding their capacity to enjoy life and know that it is possible to be successful (Konopka, 1973).

Konopka (1973) believed in the importance of youth being a participant in society, stated that, “youth must develop the capacity to make decisions in many areas: school interests, work interests, use of discretionary time, the kind of friends they want to cultivate” (p. 302). In 1990, the Search Institute expanded DST. DST posited that when the environment and relationships within the said environment supports healthy development positive youth development occurred (Lerner et al., 2005). In order for youth to develop, the “Five Cs” must be present which were competence, confidence, connection, character, and caring (Lerner et al., 2005; Balsano et al., 2007). The combination of the Five Cs represented a more expansive understanding of positive youth development than Konopka’s (1973) original proposition. According to DST when youth possessed all five attributes, a sixth one emerged which was “contribution” (Lerner et al.,
DST believed that community-based youth programs provided such support for the healthy development of young people (Digby & Ferrari, 2005; Lerner et al., 2005). Developmental assets were a research-driven model with DST as the foundation, in addition to research that supported resiliency and prevention (Search Institute, 2011).

Based on DST research, Search Institute (2011) established the 40 developmental assets model in 1990 which outlined the relationships youth need, the opportunities they should have, and the personal qualities they should possess in order to thrive and avoid risk (Search Institute, 2011). The more of the 40 developmental assets youth possessed the greater the chance for the youth to thrive in society (Search Institute, 2011).

**Culturally Relevant Theory**

Lastly, culturally relevant theory scholars argued that the disengagement in school activities and achievement gaps among Whites and other races was due in part to differences in culture. According to Ladson-Billings (1995a), culturally relevant theory was similar to other critical theories (e.g. critical race theories, feminist theories) but more specifically concerned with empowering the collective as opposed to just the individual. Ladson-Billings (1995a) stated, “Culturally relevant pedagogy rests on three criteria or propositions: (a) students must experience academic success; (b) students must develop and/or maintain cultural competence; and (c) students must develop a critical consciousness through which they challenge the status quo of the current social order” (p.160). Furthermore, Ladson-Billing (1999) argued racism is not an aberration but a normal thread in the fabric of American society.

Ladson-Billings (2006) insisted society shift the focus from thinking it was the student who was underachieving to understanding that the educational system was that
needed repair. Culturally relevant theory provided a framework that explained why students of color in high school are disengaged. Lynn (1999) asserted that culturally relevant theory allowed students to affirm and embrace their own cultural context without feeling alienated. As Woodland’s (2008) findings indicated, urban youth sustained participation in after-school programs if they found it culturally relevant in addition to other contributing factors. Tatum (1997) argued that it was vital for students of color to receive cultural images and messages that were positive, and those students should be critical of and reject negative stereotypes learned from the dominant White culture.

Importantly, in this study, I did not intend to test or prove any existing theories but to identify what factors contributed to recruitment and retention in the after-school programs. However, I presented theories that helped conceptualize how students of color in high school are recruited and retained in after-school programs,

- encouraging intrinsic motivation through meeting basic needs (autonomy, competence, and relatedness).
- ensuring the environment fosters positive youth development.
- developing a critical consciousness and awareness of culture

Significance of the Study

Most after-school programs were unable to attract or sustain the participation of older youth (Arbreton et al., 2008). Examining out why students join and stay led us to greater understanding about recruitment and retention. Clearly, the research reviewed revealed that after-school programs have a positive effect on students of color, especially those with low-income. The significance of this study added to the current body of research. I obtained constructs that students of color attributed to enrollment and
increased retention in after-school programs. These constructs led to the discovery of suggestive methods improving participation in quality after-school program for high school student, which allowed for a reduction of unsupervised time spent after school.

According to research, low-income high school students participated in juvenile crimes and other at-risk behaviors (i.e., smoking, drinking, and drug use) most during school days between the hours of 3 p.m. and 6 p.m. (Apsler, 2009; Afterschool Alliance, 2008). A specific challenge older youth of color faced was that they were more likely to spend after-school hours in unstructured, unsupervised environments, which increases the risk factors (Afterschool Alliance, 2009c). Studies showed that without positive adult support systems students struggle to achieve (Lewis & Moore, 2008).

After-school programs provided various social and academic benefits to older youth (Afterschool Alliance, 2009b). Research showed that youth who spent time in after-school programs sustained better relationships with other youth (Chung, 2000). During a time when they may feel disengaged or disinterested in school, older youth participated after school if the programs were designed for their age group, employed effective strategies for recruitment, and offered highly engaging activities (American Youth Policy Forum, 2006). Additionally, those beneficial outcomes tend to be even greater for low-income youth living in at-risk communities (Chung, 2000).

Besides having a positive impact on youth, research studies indicated that the duration and frequency of participation in after-school programs were important to produce positive outcomes (Granger & Kane, 2004; Reisner et al., 2006; Reisner et al., 2007). However, despite increased availability and access to after-school programs, researchers have noted that high school youth do not participate in large numbers (Wimer
et al., 2006; Carnegie Council on Adolescent Development, 1992; Baker & Pearson, 2007). Many after-school program providers find it difficult to recruit and retain youth, especially once they have entered middle school and high school (Afterschool Alliance, 2009c; Lauver, 2004)

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this qualitative study was to gain insights from high school students of color regarding recruitment and retention practices in after-school programs. For purposes of this study, I defined after-school programs as adult-supervised activities and services that operate in the high school on a regular basis to serve older-youth when school is not in session (i.e., morning school, afterschool, weekends, school holidays, and summer). Cook-Sather (2002) argued that many of our educational constructs was built on “adults’ ideas about the educational pedagogy.

This study explored aspects, built on “youth” ideas, of the after-school environment that they found to be reasons why they and/or other students enrolled and kept attending after-school programs. The findings from this study contributed to the growing body of research regarding factors that attract and sustain older youth, generated new approaches and implications in after-school programs for program practitioners and policymakers, and encouraged youth inclusion in shaping programs as an effective model for after-school program reform.

Definitions of Terms

After-school program- adult-supervised activities and services that operate in the high school on a regular basis to serve older-youth when
school is not in session (i.e., morning school, afterschool, weekends, school holidays, and summer)

**Development of youth**- “set of practices that adults use to provide youth with the types of relationships and experiences needed to fuel healthy development” (Wilson-Simmons, 2007, p. 1).

**Enrolled student**- an after-school program participant in attendance for at least one offered program activity in a given school year; when participant joins the program; also called recruited student

**Highly engaged youth**- high school student who spends time with the after-school program, shares information with others about the program, initiates program activities, brings other peers to program activity, and advocates on behalf of the after-school program (Jong, 2011).

**Incentives**- methods in the form of activities (i.e. college trips) or rewards (i.e. stipends) after-school programs use to motivate and/or reward a participant in after-school programs (Collins, Bronte-Tinkew, & Burkhouse, 2008).

**Low-income student**- a student who is eligible to receive free or reduced-price lunch based on socioeconomic factors identified by the National School Lunch Act.

**Marketing**- activities and processes for creating, communicating, delivering, and exchanging offerings that have value for
students, parents, schools, stakeholders, and the community at large (American Marketing Associations, 2011).

*Older youth*- high school student between the ages of 14 and 19; also referred to as *high school student*, *teen*, and *adolescent*

*Participant*- enrolled student actively engaged in the after-school program and attend at least 50% of after-school program activities during the school year; an actively engaged after-school program student

*Quality after-school program*-after-school program that fosters youth development, ensuring that the participants experience healthy development, academic success and support, and life skills through a variety of program offerings; after-school program that is located in healthy and safe environments and are supervised by engaged and caring adults; also called *high quality after-school programs*.

*Recruitment*- the process of attracting and motivating older youth to enroll into an after-school program

*Retention*- the process of obtaining sustained participation in an after-school program

*Social connectedness*- “frequent, affectively pleasant interactions in the context of a temporally stable and enduring framework of affective concern” (Baumeister & Leary, 1995, p. 497))
Student of color- term used to describe a student who identifies as being part of one at least one of four ethnic minority groups: (a) African American; (b) Asian American/ Pacific Islanders; (c) Hispanics/Latinos, or (d) Native Americans/Alaska Natives; also called urban youth

Student voice- active, distinct, and concentrated ways older youth represent themselves throughout society; student’s ability to contribute and make changes to program, practice, and policy; also called youth voice or meaningful student involvement (Fletcher, 2005).

Urban- a place where the majority of the population comes from at least one of four ethnic minority groups: (a) African American; (b) Asian American/ Pacific Islanders; (c) Hispanics/Latinos, and (d) Native Americans/Alaska Natives

Research Questions

I investigated the following research questions:

1. What factors do students of color in high school identify as contributing to recruitment in after-school programs?
2. What factors do students of color in high school identify as contributing to the retention in after-school programs?
3. What factors do students of color in high school identify as barriers to the recruitment and retention in after-school programs?
Summary of Remaining Chapters

In this chapter, I outlined the problem of recruitment and retention of urban teens in after-school programs. I also provided theoretical frameworks, the significance and purpose of this study, key terms, and research questions of this study.

In Chapter 2, I provided a brief historical overview of after-school programs. Additionally, I provided a review of selected articles concerning issues related to after-school program impacts and research on students of color and the achievement gap. I also reviewed previous recruitment and retention studies paying special attention to studies that included low-income, ethnic minority, older youth, and student voice.

Chapter 3 presented the methodology and procedures used in this study. I discussed the research design and the open-ended focus group questions used. These questions encouraged the high school students of color to provide their perspective on recruitment and retention in after-school programs.

In Chapter 4, I reported on the findings from the data collection and data analysis used during this qualitative research study as well as the themes and sub-themes that emerged during the three focus group interviews and other collected data.

Lastly, in Chapter 5, I discussed the findings reported in Chapter 4. Chapter 5 includes a new comprehensive youth engagement model based on the findings to assist in the recruitment and retention of urban teens in after-school programs and to help programs assess their current recruitment and retention strategies. I concluded by offering suggestions for future research on recruitment and retention of urban teens and other related issues as well as other recommendations based on the findings.
Chapter 2: Review of the Literature

Introduction and Purpose

In this chapter, I reviewed the research literature focused on after-school programs. The purpose of this review was to evaluate the evidence for the impact of after-school programs and examine recruitment and retention studies, in particular students of color and students from low-income families. I eliminated studies that involved only elementary school aged participants in the sample.

In addition to searching for indexed articles in databases, I also searched books, unpublished papers, dissertations, and conference presentations. I created an article information sheet to (see Appendix D) (Cone & Foster, 1993). I later transferred all information onto a database. The literature review, which provided the framework for this recruitment and retention inquiry, was comprised of four elements: (a) studies evaluating the impact of after-school programs; (b) studies on recruiting and retaining older youth; (c) studies focused on ethnic minority, low-income, underserved youth; and (d) studies involving student perspective or student voice.

Brief Historical Overview of After-school Programs

After-school programs have a long history in the United States. Although not in the same context as it is known today (e.g. school-based programs, summer programs), after-school programming was provided to youth since the late 1800s (Miller, Snow, & Lauer, 2004; Sarampote, Bassett, & Winsler, 2004). Charities located in settlement houses first provided after-school program service (Sarampote et al., 2004). Historically,
after-school programs were established to help meet the needs of low-income children and families (Miller et al., 2004). These programs were started by individual women and men hoping to rescue children from the “dangerous streets” posed by in challenging immigrant neighborhoods of major cities (Halpern, 2002).

The United States government began to first fund after-school programs during World War II when women began to enter the workforce and childcare services were needed (Miller et al., 2004). Around this same time, the government child labor laws were enacted and mandatory schooling was enforced. During this time, two types of after-school contexts emerged: the unstructured, childcare type and a more structured program that resembled the public education model (Halpern, 2002).

By the 1960s, at the height of civil rights movement, American neighborhoods changed. An influx of African American and Latino families begun to move into those neighborhoods, thus, after-school programs begun to reconsider what population they served (Halpern, 2002). In addition, during this time there was a rise in drug-related and gang activity and the neighborhoods, which started to became unsafe for the children living there (Halpern, 2002).

By the 1970s, a surge of women entered the workforce that increased the demand for after-school childcare (Stonehill et al., 2009). Between the 1970s and 1980s most of the after-school programs focused on prevention (e.g. drug-use, teenage pregnancy, alcohol consumption). During the 1980s, the national high school dropout rates were at its highest levels at over 14% for all races. With increased in high-school dropout rates and a decrease in test scores in standardized exams, especially in urban schools, after-
school programs became more structured and academically focused to address the achievement gap (Halpern, 2002).

In the 1990s, a paradigm shift occurred in the way after-school providers operationalized their programs. Programs that fostered protective factors in youth led to a greater need of empirical evaluations of effectiveness (Catalano, Berglund, Ryan, Lonczak, & Hawkins, 1999). Becoming more than a just safe place for youth, after-school programs started to transform (Hellison & Wright, 2003). These adult-led programs became structured and more developmental and empowerment-based, serving a smaller number of youth over a longer period of time (Hellison & Wright, 2003).

Further development of after-school programs occurred in 1998 when the U.S. Congress authorized the Gaining Early Awareness and Readiness for Undergraduate Programs (GEAR UP) initiative. GEAR UP provided $120,000,000 of federal funds “to foster increased knowledge, expectations, and preparation for postsecondary education among low-income students and their families” (Standing et al., 2008). A few years later with the federal No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act, a demand grew for evidence-based approaches in education, including after-school programming. Slavin (2008) stated that the government became strong advocates in “both expanding research on practical programs using rigorous methods, especially randomized experiments, and using the findings of this research to guide policy and practice” (p. 5). Despite governmental advocacy for after-school programs, current economic conditions resulted in drop in federal funds for after-school programming. For example, funding for GEAR UP was recently reduced by 6.3% in 2011 (U.S. Department of Education, 2011).
After-school programs evolved over the years in the how they served youth. Presently the research showed quality after-school programs faced challenges to distinguished themselves as a *compliment* not a *supplement* to school efforts (Mehesy, 2004). In other words, schools primarily focused on developing core skills of education in a classroom instructional environment and enforced zero tolerance policies to deal with at-risk behaviors. By contrast, after-school programs primarily focused on developing positive youth developmental assets through in low staff-to-student environments and implemented prevention policies that addressed risky youth practices (Mehesy, 2004).

Although there was a clear difference between school and after-school, after-school programs felt pressured in meeting educational standards due to high unmet need in schools. Halpern (2002) argued,

> In recent discussions, numerous program directors have noted pressure from funders not only to tie their activities to school learning standards but to demonstrate that they were helping to improve participation children’s standardized test scores. While after-school programs certainly have a place in helping children come to enjoy and find meaning in reading and writing, it is not their role—not is it in their interest—to commit themselves to fostering academic achievement in it narrow sense (p. 204).

**Impacts of After-school Programs**

Due to the initial influx of funding, the public and private sectors wanted evidence-based approach in after-school practices (Scott-Little, Hamann, & Jurs, 2002). Fiester (2004) argued that program directors, funders, and researchers felt pressured to provide evidence of effectiveness. Hence, a growth in research over the past ten years
examined the impact of after-school programs (Marsh & Kleitman, 2002). This research measuring varied in outcome measurements, methodological approaches, and theoretical or conceptual frameworks. This research was used to explain these impacts and practice and policy implications (Marsh & Kleitman, 2002).

Since the research described in this study examined factors for recruitment and retention in after-school programs, it was important to first review the literature regarding the impact of after-school programs. A few studies found little or no impact (Apsler, 2009; Zief, Lauver, Maynard, 2006). However, a majority of the literature linked after-school programs to a variety of positive developmental outcomes such as academic (Fredricks & Eccles, 2006; Gardner et al., 2008) and emotional (Durlak & Weissberg, 2007). After-school programs also affected social (Juvonen, 2007) and behavioral (Hellison & Wright, 2003) development. Much of the research referred to “high quality” after-school programs that were connected to positive impacts (Gardner, Roth, & Brooks-Gunn, 2009).

Birmingham, Pechman, Russell, and Mielke (2005) investigated high quality after-school projects funded by The After-School Corporation (TASC). The researchers found the following five characteristics to be present in high-quality after-school programs: (a) a broad array of enrichment opportunities, (b) opportunities for skill building and mastery, (c) intentional relationship building, (d) a strong, experienced leader/manager supported by a trained and supervised staff, and (e) the administrative, fiscal, and professional-development support of the sponsoring organization. Pittman and Wilson-Ahlstrom (2004) argued that high quality after-school programs provided
opportunities for youth to have meaningful involvement and promote effective leadership and management skills.

The studies in the literature linked program attendance to program impacts (e.g. Birmingham et al., 2005). Birmingham et al. (2005) found that children will likely attend an after-school program if the youth (a) are on-task; (b) listen actively and attentively to peers and staff; (c) contribute opinions, ideas, and/or concerns to discussions; (d) have opportunities to make meaningful choices; and (f) take leadership responsibility/roles.

The American Psychological Association (APA) (2002) provided context on healthy adolescent (ages 14-19) growth. They stated that professionals working with youth or trying to understand youth must be aware of various factors (cognitive, emotional, social, and behavioral) in youth development. This framework of adolescent development provided me with a basis for organizing the extant literature on impact of after-school programs and recruitment and retention in said programs. Marsh and Kleitman (2002) asserted that a quality after-school programs:

- build character, develop skills in a variety of non-academic areas, and lead to more well-rounded, socially adept, and mature students. The focus of this approach, however, is on non-academic benefits of (after-school program) that are not at the expense of more narrowly defined academic outcomes emphasized in the traditional school curriculum (p. 471).

**Cognitive.** Cognitive development referred to the ability to reason, think, and understand (APA, 2002). After-school programs that encouraged cognitive development engaged the youth to higher-level thinking (e.g. effective reasoning, problem solving, abstract thinking, critical thinking, and future planning) (APA, 2002). Fredricks and
Eccles’ (2006) study provided an example of how after-school programs fostered cognitive skill building. The researchers analyzed data sets from the Maryland Adolescent Development in Context Study (MADICS), a community-based longitudinal study (n = 1,482; 61% African American). The data collection occurred in six waves; Wave 1 started in the fall of 1991 as the students begun middle school and ended with Wave 6, three years after high school. This particular study examined data from the third, fourth, fifth wave.

Fredricks and Eccles (2006) found that extracurricular activities predicted academic adjustment, psychological adjustment, educational status, civic engagement, and adult adjustment. In addition, Fredricks and Eccles (2006) found that students who were highly motivated were generally those who participated in an array of extracurricular activities. These findings indicated that after-school programs had a significant impact on high school students.

Furthermore, a longitudinal study by Mahoney, Lord, and Carryl (2005) found after-school program participants (n= 599) from a disadvantage urban city in the United States appeared to devote more time in enrichment and academic activities. The study drew on the ecological systems theory where adolescent development transpired through a bi-directional approach in which the student affected the environment and environment influenced the student. The participants had significantly higher achievements in reading and teachers rated them as having greater expectancy for future success than those who did not participate in the after-school program.

Marsh and Kleitman (2002) analyzed longitudinal survey administered by the Department of Education to 12,084 students. The purpose of this study was to measure
social behavior in students in the eighth, tenth, and twelfth grades and two years after. They found the dosage of program (how many times students attended) was associated with positive academic indicators such as higher grades, increased homework completion, as well as higher application, admission, and retention into college.

An intervention study by Hanlon, Simon, O'Grady, Carswell, and Callaman (2009) also examined the cognitive impact of after-school programs. The Village Model of Care, an after-school intervention program, focused on how the community and other extended family members to supported the parents of at risk students (Hanlon et al., 2009). Grounded in the social developmental model, which considered the role that risk and protective factors play in the development of deviant behavior, The Village Model of Care recruited middle school students entering 6th grade to participate in the four-year study. Two schools participated and one served as the intervention site (n=237) and the other served as the control group (n=241). Prior to beginning the program, assessments (youth questionnaire, a parent/caregiver questionnaire, school grades and other records, child behavior checklist, teachers report forms, a self-concept scale and a scale to measure conduct and emotional problems) were completed.

The researchers found students who were at the intervention after-school program tended to have a better grade point average improvement percentage over the control group. The researchers also discovered that the improvement in grade point average increased relative to the number of after school mentoring sessions that the youths attended. Interestingly, the results for this four-year study showed that besides the improvement in grade point average in the intervention group, the results of the other measures were not statistically significant.
Another study by Gardner et al., (2008) also found that high school sponsored activities have positive impacts on cognitive development. They analyzed data from the National Education Longitudinal Study (NELS), a national longitudinal study that begun spring of 1988 with an assessment of 24,599 eighth-grade students. Reassessment of the students occurred during the 10th grade (70.8% of original eighth grade respondents), the 12th grade (69.6% of original eighth grade respondents), two years after high school (56.2% of original eighth grade respondents) and eight years after high school (46.3% of original eighth grade respondents). Using positive youth development as a theoretical framework, the researchers found that students gained positive outcomes such as academic, in addition to higher civic engagement and future occupational success.

One noteworthy finding in the Gardner et al. (2008) study was that duration and intensity of participation matters. Students who participated in activities over two years achieved greater successes as adults than those who participated only for single year. This supported the theory of change that indicated that the length of time and intensity of program participation was as important as participation alone (Vandell, 2006). Thus, researchers should not only look at recruitment alone but at retention in after-school programs to obtain greater positive outcomes (Gardner et al., 2008).

In a study prepared for the United States Department of Education, Standing et al. (2008) conducted a comprehensive evaluation on the Gaining Early Awareness and Readiness for Undergraduate Programs (GEAR UP). This longitudinal comparative study analyzed a stratified sampling of 18 GEAR UP schools and 18 non GEAR UP schools (n= 4,692). GEAR UP is a national college access after-school initiative that offers academic assistance, mentoring, college application and financial aid information.
to low-income (families with incomes at or below 130 percent of the poverty level) families. Since 1999, GEAR UP had received over $3 billion dollars in federal grant funding (U.S. Department of Education, 2011).

One of the goals for the GEAR UP study was to focus on student outcomes that were considered to be related to probability of attending a postsecondary educational institution (Standing et al., 2008). The researcher collected data from site visits, students, parents, student records, school transcripts, project activity records, and annual performance reports. The researchers found the GEAR UP participants were more knowledgeable about postsecondary education and were taking more rigorous science courses than nonparticipants (Standing et al., 2008).

**Emotional.** Researchers found that after-school program not only impacted cognitive development but also attributed to positive emotional development. Emotional development referred to the ability to establish a coherent and realistic sense of identity in the context of relating to others (APA, 2002). After-school programs that nurtured emotional development provides a space where students understand self-concept (belief one has about oneself) and self-esteem (the evaluation of how one feels about one’s self-concept) (APA, 2002.) Programs that encouraged development of a sense of identity, emotional intelligence and embraced ethnic diversity and gender awareness support emotional development.

Durlak and Weissberg (2007) argued that there was a gap in the literature regarding certain types of measured impacts of after-school programs and that many studies focused on academic achievement. Using data from 73 existing studies, they found that students who participated in after-school programs improved significantly in
feelings and attitudes (Durlak & Weissberg, 2007). The participants were from elementary, junior, and high school and predominantly ethnic minorities. From an emotional development perspective, researchers found participants’ feelings and attitudes showed more improvement in two explicit indicators: self-perceptions, such as improvements and changes in self-confidence and self-esteem, and school bonding, as revealed by their attitudes toward school (Durlak & Weissberg, 2007).

Garcia-Reid, Reid and Peterson (2005) also found a positive self-concept helped in development, especially for Latino students. The study attempted to find the factors and barriers enabling school engagement for Latinos in at-risk communities. According to Garcia-Reid et al. (2005), the achievement gap was due to poor academic instruction, low societal expectations, and lack of resources. Furthermore, feeling unsafe hindered learning. The sample population included 226 Latinos, two thirds of which were from two parent households. The study attributed positive behavior, positive thoughts about the neighborhood, and closeness with friends and peers to school engagement.

In the context of working with students of color, according to APA (2002) building a cultural identity was an important component to emotional development. Bhattacharya and Quiroga (2009) asserted that there was a need for after-school programs to prepare for the influx of English language learners (EL). With the understanding that by the year 2030 40% of school-age population will be language minorities, Bhattacharya and Quiroga (2009) suggested after-school programs to serve as “cultural brokers.” In other words, after-school programs worked towards promoting the EL students’ culture and language and building connections between the parents, schools, and communities.
Cultural understanding was an important factor in youth engagement (Bhattacharya & Quiroga, 2009; Irizarry, 2009). Research conducted by Irizarry (2009) explored the concept of "representin" which was defined as "a shared sense of identity and responsibility based on membership of the socially constructed community" (p. 489). Irizarry (2009) asserted that because hip-hop had significant influence over many of the contemporary urban youths’ ideologies, the ability to engage and integrate this culture into the curriculum posed several benefits.

Irizarry (2009) argued that hip-hop added to the literary dialogue and education. Using the community nomination method, the researcher identified 10 teachers as participants (five White, three Latino, and two African-American) with the age range of 23 to 56 years. Five of the participants were male and five were female, and all of the teachers taught in an urban school district. Eighty-five percent of the students in this school district were African-American or Latino. Irizarry (2009) conducted semi-structured in-depth interviews, transcribed and transformed data into vignettes, and found the following:

Most significantly, through engaging students in critical cultural responses pedagogy, practicing, teaching that is rooted in praxis, be(coming) a member of the community in which one teaches, and by enacting new socioculturally situated identities informed by lasting authentic relationships with urban students and their communities, teachers, can represent in ways that are valued by their students. (p. 511)

Social. Thus far, the literature revealed positive cognitive and emotional development attributed to after-school program participation. After-schools were also
found to impact students socially. Social development is the ability to build positive relationships with others (peers, family, school, work, and community) (APA, 2002). Juvonen (2007) postulated that social connection built a number of protective factors (i.e. sense of belonging, friendships) in the student. In addition, social connectedness prevented a number of risk factors such as social alienation and dropping out of school (Juvonen, 2007). Juvonen (2007) further discussed the importance of peer relationships to engagement in school.

After-school programs provided a space where students could connect with each other and positively influence one another. The after-school program was one of the few contexts where students can feel protected when engaged in academic discussions. Previous studies suggested academic achievement, although desired, was not always supported due to low self-concept about achievement (Tyson, Darity, & Castellino, 2005; Walker, 2006). Walker (2006) suggested students form peer groups that provided support that often was unnoticed by parents or school adults.

The adults in the after-school program provided positive outcomes in the lives of high school students of color as well. Chang, Greenberger, Chen, and Heckhausen (2010) conducted a study that examined social resources provided by a nonparental adults (VIPs) and found that VIPs had a significant relationship to high school students (n=754) educational and socioemotional adjustment. They measured the social capital (educational attainment, misconduct, and depressed mood) of the VIPs. The researchers found that VIPs’ social capital was significantly related to youths’ outcomes and that the educational attainment of the VIPs was associated with changes in all four outcome
variables (i.e. educational expectations, postsecondary school grades, misconduct, and depressive symptoms).

**Behavioral.** After-school programs were linked to positive cognitive, emotional, and social developmental impacts. Additionally, after-school programs were positively associated with students’ behavioral development. Adolescent experimentation with different behaviors (protective or risky), allowed them to “fine-tune” their development (APA, 2002). Because students needed a space to experiment and experience the consequences of their decision-making, the after-school programs offered the opportunity to provide that space supervised by a caring adult. The students benefited from the quality time they spent with an adult, which reduced the likelihood of at-risk behaviors. Pettit et al. (1999) found a relationship between unsupervised activity and high levels of problem behaviors.

Research indicated that after-school programs fostered good habits (Hofferth & Jankuniene, 2001). The activities students engaged in after-school helped them during the school day. For example, after-school participants who read in the after-school program displayed higher student achievement outcomes (Hofferth & Jankuniene, 2001). In addition, youth participating in after-school programs typically did not watch as much television as those who go home unsupervised after-school (Chung, 2000).

After-school programs helped youth recognize their own behavioral changes. Hellison and Wright (2003) found participation in after-school programs was linked to positive youth development outcomes. The longitudinal study, based on personal-social responsibility model, examined the attendance records from two after-school programs located in a low-income community. Seventy-eight youth began attending the program.
which had a significant attrition rate after year one. After year three, 43 participants remained. They collected and analyzed data from attendance records and end of the year evaluations. Membership into this after-school program was voluntary however, the vice principal selected students to participate with previous disciplinary issues. Hellison and Wright (2003) found 38 of the 43 study participants self-reported to developing self-efficacy and self-confidence in skills linked to participation in the after-school programs.

Although it was essential to focus on the positive traits of youth, attentiveness of the risk behaviors of adolescents was also of vital concern, especially to those who wanted to help avoid and modify their behaviors (APA, 2002). Research found that after-school program participation reduced antisocial behaviors (Gottfredson, Weisman, Soulé, Womer, & Lu, 2004; Weisman et al, 2005). Pedersen & Seidman (2005) noticed a decline in participation in after-school programs activities when participants enter high school. They found that the high school students who did partake in after-school activities received better grades in a class than their peers who did not participate. Importantly, regarding behavioral development, the researchers also found that participation in after-school programs were associated with positive youth development. For example, school-based activity participants reported to have higher rates of engagement and less antisocial behavior than nonparticipants did. They suggested the creation or enhancement of a variety of opportunities for low-income urban youth.

A number of studies in the body of literature provided evidence that linked involvement in after-school programs to the reduction in delinquent behavior (Gottfredson et al., 2004; Pedersen & Seidman, 2005; Weisman et al., 2005). Using pre-existing data from Maryland After School Community Grant Program (MASCGP),
Weisman et al. (2005) evaluated after-school program implementation and youth outcomes. The researchers analyzed data comprised of pre-test surveys (n=486) and post-test surveys (n=402 or 82% of pre-tested youth). The sample included 46% male and 82% non-White (71% African American, 11% other races) participants. The findings revealed high participation levels (attending more than 30 lessons) predicted increases in GPA. The MASCGP results also indicated that highly structured after-school programs led to lower anti-social behavior (i.e. rebelliousness, intentions of drug-use).

Positive behavioral outcomes were associated with after-school programs. Hirsch, Hedges, Mekinda, and Stawicki (2011) assessed 13 After-School Matters (ASM) programs that provided apprenticeship opportunities after school to high school students in Chicago. Thirteen randomly selected ASM programs with their respective control groups participated in this study (n=535). The majority of the participants were African American and Latino. The researchers found students participating in ASM were more self-regulated than those students who did not participate. The researchers defined self-regulation as the way “the management of their attention and emotions” (Hirsch et al, 2011, p.19). The researchers further argued that people with high self-regulation engaged in activities and were not easily distracted.

Vandell et al. (2006) also found that participation in after-school programs influenced behavior. The researchers’ comparative study examined the academic, social, and psychological outcomes for disadvantaged youth who participated in an after school program. They compared these youth with a controlled sample of the same demographics who did not attend after school program, but attended the same schools.
The control group were students that took care of themselves (self-care) during the after school hours.

The study used assets orientation, which was the assumption that all young people, regardless of the socioeconomic status, had the capacity to make positive and healthy choices, as a conceptual framework to examine 35 programs in a high-poverty area. The selected programs served at least 30 youth in elementary and/or middle school, four to five times per week. The researchers followed the participants during a two-year period and collected data through parent, teacher, and student surveys as well as on-site observation. The researchers concluded that adult supervised after school activities improved participants’ behaviors (conduct and work habits) as compared with participants in the self-care group. They suggested that adult supervision offered by after-school program built protective factors in additional to diminished risk factors.

The supervision provided by after-school programs was critical to positive development. The existing literature revealed the majority of youth who went unsupervised during the after-school hours came from low-income households (Birmingham et al, 2005; Weisman & Gottfredson, 2001), were 37% more likely to become pregnant (Dobbins, 2005), and were engaged in delinquent behavior (i.e. drug use) (Osgood, Anderson, & Shaffer, 2005). Osgood et al. (2005) found that unsupervised socializing among peers was a predicator of delinquency.

The lack of adult authority figures decreased informal social controls thus created a slight motivation for youth to have an audience when committing negative acts (Osgood et al., 2005). After-school programs provided the adult supervised peer interactions that youth needed during those hours. Time spent without adult supervision
was connected to growth in externalizing behavior problems (Pettit et al, 1999). The link between unsupervised socializing and increased antisocial behavior was found to correlate with the freedom the youth felt to commit negative acts and to the rewards the youth received from peers when acts were committed (Osgood et al., 2005).

Furthermore, researchers found a correlation between negative peer influences and academic achievement. Lopez, Wishard, Gallimore, and Rivera (2006) conducted open –ended interviews and examined peer influences of gangs and crews on Latino high school students. The researchers analyzed data from 77 Latino high school students. Lopez’s et al. (2006) study revealed that very low achievers interacted with gangs the most and solicited more often to join by gang members. This study provided evidence for the need for adult supervised quality after-school programming for high school students.

**Duration.** Research revealed that consistent and continuous participation by the student fostered positive developmental outcomes (Durlak & Weissberg, 2007; Kennedy, Wilson, Valladares, & Bronte-Tinkew, 2007; Okeke, 2008; Weisman & Gottfredson, 2001). Attendance was an important factor in evaluating the effects of after-school programs (Apsler, 2009; Kane, 2003). Pierce and Vandell (1999) verified that at-risk students developed better academic work habits if they attended the after-school program more frequently. Not only did the participants performed better academically because of the frequency of attendance, but in the researchers’ study they also attended school more often. Kane’s (2003) evaluation study on the impact of after-school programs showed that the average participant in after-school programs attended sporadically. The average
attendance rate for an after-school program offered five school days ranged from .9 to 2.4 days per week (Kane, 2003).

Gardner et al. (2008) research study wanted to find out if the duration of youths’ participation in after-school programs during high school positively associated with educational, civic, and occupational success after high school. They found that the duration of participation in school-based after-school programs was positively associated with educational attainment and civic engagement. They found that although the pathways that link participation duration and intensity to educational success remained unclear, educational success partly explained the link between participation in after-school programs and civic and occupational success when high school students graduated.

Critics. There were a few studies that were critical to the evidence that linked positive impacts to after-school programs (Feldman & Matjasko, 2005; James-Burdumy et al., 2005; Ritter et al., 2003). For example, Larson (1994) and Eccles and Barber (1999) found in their studies that the positive outcomes associated with after-school programs (academic achievement, social connectedness, community engagement) did not apply to after-school sports programs. Posner and Vandell (1999) found similar results with after-school sports when they compared low-income youth participation in nonsport after-school activities and sports activities. They found that for the low-income African-American children in their sample, time spent on nonsport extracurricular activities after school was associated with better teacher-reported emotional adjustment in school and time in coached sports was associated with lower academic grades (Posner & Vandell, 1999).
In addition, a few researchers argued that the after-school evaluations had methodological limitations (Apsler, 2009; Feldman & Matjasko, 2005; James-Burdumy et al., 2005; Ritter et al., 2003). These limitations included the lack of a control group or poorly matched comparison group, no cost-benefit analysis, little information about the evaluation methodology, selection bias in program participation, and poor record keeping (Apsler, 2009; Feldman & Matjasko, 2005; Gándara & Bial, 2001; Gullatt & Jan, 2003; James-Burdumy et al., 2005; Perna & Swail, 2002; Ritter et al., 2003).

This first section of the literature review demonstrated that there is a relationship between after-school programs and positive adolescent development. After-school programs were a source of academic support for youth at risk of school failure, especially when schools struggled to meet federal achievement standards (Gardner et al., 2008). Advocates and policymakers continued to support after-school programs and believed these programs supplemented education and helped in closing the achievement gaps among students (Gardner et al., 2009; Halpern, 2002)

Students of Color and the Achievement Gap

It was evidenced that U.S. high schools were in a crisis when, according to Lee, Griggs, and Donahue (2007), just 30% of the ninth grade students in the nation read at grade level in 2007. Also in 2007, nearly 7,000 students dropped out of school each day (Editorial Projects in Education, 2007). In all of the educational statistical measurements (graduation rate, reading level, standardize test score, dropout rate) students of color lagged behind Caucasian and Asian students and that had serious financial implications (Rouse, 2005). For example, in 2005 a high school student that graduated in the United States earned approximately $10,000 more a year than a high school dropout did. (Rouse,
This lag was known as the achievement gap and was a term used to describe the inequalities between African American and Caucasian, Latino and Caucasian, and recent immigrant and Caucasian students in standardized tests (Ladson-Billings, 2006).

The achievement gap was one of the most deliberated topics in education in the United States (Ladson-Billings, 2006; Rothstein, 2004). According to a report from the National Governors Association (2011),

Hispanic and African-American high school students are more likely to drop out of high school in every state. Of these high school graduates, college matriculation rates for African-American and Hispanic high-school students remain below those of white high-school graduates – although they have risen in recent years. Furthermore, of those students enrolling in college, Hispanic and black young adults are only half as likely to earn a college degree as white students. (para. 11)

New York State Education Department (2011) concurred with the National Governors Association findings and purported that underperforming students are not “college ready” (New York State Education Department, 2011). New York State Education Department (2011) found that nearly 25% of college students in all of New York State two-and four-year higher educational institutions were enrolled in remedial courses.

The achievement gap among the races had global implications as well. The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) (2007) found American schools did not do enough to eradicate the disparities compared to other developing countries that were making strides in the helping the low educated.
populations (OECD, 2007). OECD (2007) found the achievement gap between the most and least-academically proficient students in the United States among the highest of all OECD countries (Kirsch, Braun, Yamamoto, & Sum, 2007). The achievement gap prevented the least academically proficient student from obtaining a sustainable college and career opportunity (Alliance for Excellent Education, 2008).

The analysis of the 2010 U.S. census revealed the “gap” was becoming prevalent in other areas in American society besides education (Kochhar, Fry, & Taylor, 2011; Logan, 2011). Kochhar’s et al. (2011) recent analysis of 2010 U.S. census data reported huge wealth gaps among the races and found White households earned 20 times higher than Black households and 18 times higher than Hispanic households. According to Logan (2011), even if wealth was attained, Blacks and Hispanics continued to live in poorer neighborhoods than Whites. In fact, Logan (2011) study found:

Minorities at every income level live in poorer neighborhoods than do Whites with comparable incomes. Disparities are greatest for the lowest income minorities, and they are much sharper for blacks and Hispanics than for Asians. Affluent blacks and Hispanics live in poorer neighborhoods than whites with working class incomes. (p.1)

Students of color faced significant challenges in the United States, and the achievement gap were one of many, especially for those students living in low-income families. Recently, the Annie E. Casey Foundation (2011) reported that 31 Million children are living in poverty in the United States, which reflected a 7% increase over the last ten years. There was a direct relationship between high level of students in poverty and school failure (Orfield & Lee, 2005). Low-income youth were inclined to attend
failing schools, live in an unsafe neighborhood with high levels of incarceration, face health challenges and lack of proper nutrition, struggle with unemployment, language barriers, and experience the "marginalization of their heritage and culture" (Afterschool Alliance, 2004, p. 1). Further, Grant et al. (2004) argued that low-income youth exposed to severe and chronic stress due financial constraints exhibited psychological problems, such as depression, anxiety, and low self-esteem, which was attributed to susceptibility to further harassment (i.e. bullying) and oppression experiences.

Grant et al. (2004) conducted research in seven urban public schools (n=1520; 64% African American and 13% Latino) with a high population of low-income students. The researchers examined the rates of internalizing (i.e. anxious, depressed, withdrawn, somatic problems) and externalizing (i.e. delinquency, aggression, antisocial) symptoms. They found a relationship between urban stressors to higher rates of internalizing and externalizing symptoms. Furthermore, parents with less education and low income were less influential over their children’s after-school activities than parents with higher education and income (Hofferth & Jankuniene, 2001). Community characteristics such as urban or suburban settings also influenced participation in after-school programs (Hofferth & Jankuniene, 2001). Urban areas tended to have limited resources, which affected the quality and attendance of their programming (Hahn, 1994).

Grant et al. (2004) further stated youth living in poverty stricken communities with higher concentrations of violence and daily financial stress, “may all lead to anger and frustration expressed through aggressive symptoms” (p. 628). A 20-year study conducted by Masten et al. (2005) found that these externalizing symptoms in adolescents in urban context undermined academic achievement. Additionally, students
of color attended low-resourced schools tend to report lower levels of student safety (e.g. higher bullying behaviors) than White students who attended high resourced schools (Cunningham, Wang, & Bishop, 2006).

Yet, despite the challenges students of color, especially those with low-income, there was a body of literature that suggested students of color possessed an extraordinary amount of resilience and high aspirations (Anthony, Alter, & Jenson, 2009; Day-Vines & Terriquez, 2008; Fredricks & Eccles, 2006; Stanton-Salazar & Spina, 2000). From an adolescent developmental framework, Howard et al. (2010), defined resilience as a “dynamic interaction of multiple individual and contextual factors” which included various family, sociocultural, and community environments which positively shaped the individual (p. 656). Students in after-school programs that strengthened youth resiliency did better in school (National Education Association, 2007).

There was a greater concern with the existence of achievement gaps. Similar to Logan’s (2011) findings of affluent people of color disproportionately living in poor neighborhoods, many high achieving students of color were disproportionately not placed in gifted programs (Hilliard, 2003; Moore, Ford, & Milner, 2005). This gap therefore not only reflected disparities in achievement but an apparent gap in opportunities for students of color (Flores, 2007). Flores (2007) study found inequities of opportunity for low income and African American and Latino students. Flores (2007) findings revealed inequities such as less access to experienced and well qualified teachers, less access to high teacher expectations, and less per student funding for their schools and argued that “any viable solution to the problem of differential achievement in mathematics must address these inequities of opportunity” (p. 37).
Additionally, Wilkins et al. (2006) found that schools with higher concentrations of African American and Latino students were twice as likely to be taught by teachers with fewer years of experience of teaching compared to schools with a majority of Caucasian students. In addition, research found that the greater the student poverty rate were in the schools the greater the percentage of inexperienced teachers (Mayer, Mullens and Moore, 2000). This problem stems from systematic inequalities in K-12 schools where low-income urban youth were overrepresented in schools districts that are underfunded and lack resources (Mayer et al., 2000; Orfield & Lee, 2005).

Adelman (2006) examined principal indicators of student academic histories in postsecondary education and found African American and Latino students experienced opportunity gaps in access to rigorous academic courses such as AP physics, AP chemistry, calculus, trigonometry or statistics. Moreover, Gándara and Bial (2001) argued that students of color faced a number of barriers including the inability to access information, lack of resource networks, poor neighborhood resources, lack of peer support for academic achievement, educational segregation, and ineffective and inefficient high school counseling. As a result, the United States educational system failed to prepare disproportionately the numbers of low-income and students of color academically and failed to confront many of the social and psychological barriers that underrepresented students faced (Gándara and Bial, 2001)

In fact, Moore et al. (2005) argued, “perhaps too little attention has been directed at the influence of social, cultural, and psychological variables” that affected students of color (p.52). Students of color have their own culture, and as Irizarry (2009) argued, those individuals working with urban youth must join in the cultural dialogue. For
example, Foster (1995) argued the pedagogy of African American teachers provided a good framework for working with students of color. The three tenants of this framework were (a) cultural solidarity, (b) affiliation or kinship, and (c) connectedness.

According to Foster’s (1995) findings, African American teachers had the ability to express cultural solidarity with their students of color by communicating in familiar style, expressing feelings of connectedness and kinship, relating to the students experiences in overcoming obstacles such as racism. Because some of these teachers lived in the same or close to the student’s home community, the teachers developed a sense of cohesion and responsibility that included taking care of the students as if they were their own (Foster, 1995).

Although the achievement gap exists, it was important to understand why and how these inequalities exist. Although poor neighborhoods and failing schools were one aspect to underachievement, there were hosts of other factors contributing to this gap. Lynn (1999) argued that one could not efficiently address the problem of who achieves in the American society without addressing systematic and institutional racism that is prevalent in Western society. Lynn (1999) stated, “the United States is and has always been a racialized state founded on a belief in the inherent inferiority and superiority of certain groups of people based on the color of their skin and other physical characteristics” (p. 622).

Some of the literature pointed out the racialized context of labeling the educational differences as an “achievement gap” (Love, 2004). The word “achievement gap” positioned Caucasian students as the gold standard by which Latino and African American students were measured (Hill, 2008). Love (2004) asserted that historically the
debate regarding the achievement gap in education changed. During the time of Brown versus the Board of Education in 1954, the legislation focused on equalizing the educational *system*, where now the discussion became equalizing the student (Love, 2004). Thus, the focus shifted from fixing the *schools* to fixing the *child* (Love, 2004).

Taylor (2006) further argued that the achievement gap reinforces systemic racism. In order to find potential solutions to the racial disparities problem those in education must address racism instead of schools being focused on fixing the students (Taylor, 2006). Furthermore, Ladson-Billings (2006) argued that a paradigm shift needed to occur from child deficit to an economic deficit model in order to address the serious disparity that existed in the U.S. educational system.

Other critical race theorists joined the scholarship regarding the achievement gap and provided a “counter-story” as to why the gap existed in the United States (Ladson-Billings, 2007; Lewis, James, Hancock, & Hill-Jackson, 2008; López, 2003; Taylor, 2006; Welner & Farley, 2010). Rosenbloom and Way’s (2004) findings suggested that:

Urban high school students struggle to live with the contradiction of American egalitarianism and the stereotypes, harassment, and discrimination they experienced in their lives. They spoke passionately about the ways in which the assumption of uniformity is harmful and how the interaction between positive and negative stereotypes shapes their daily interactions. They revealed patterns of discriminatory processes that have yet to be noted in the social science literature. Listening to their stories allowed us to begin to understand the ways in which symbolic, traditional, institutional, and individual forms of discrimination worked
in an urban high school setting that is more diverse and complex, nationally and locally, than ever before.

Despite what the label was, the gap existed. Lee’s et al. (2011) comprehensive study on the educational experiences of young men of color provided solution-based research with the goal of identifying the factors that contribute to either persistence or attrition from high school to postsecondary education. They emphasized the bleak future for young men of color and outlined the six post-secondary pathway options that existed for young men of color in United States today. They found young men of color either (a) attended a two-year or four-year college or vocational institution, (b) enlisted in the armed forces, (c) employed, (d) unemployed, (e) incarcerated (local, state, or federal prisons) or (f) dead.

The authors stated that young men of color outpaced the women of color in only the negative postsecondary options (unemployment, incarceration, and death). Lee et al. (2011) found that over 51% of Hispanic males and 45% of African American males between the ages 15 to 24 would be unemployed, incarcerated or dead. They argued that the educational disparities was an “epidemic” for young men of color and called it an “educational crisis” in the United States (Lee et al., 2011, p. 50).

After-school programs aimed to combat this educational crisis. Research provided evidence of the impact of after-school programs on youths' connection to school (attendance, grades, and high school graduation), their connection to the larger community, and preparation for college admission or work prospects (Gullatt & Jan, 2003; Standing et al., 2008). According to Gardner et al. (2009), after-school programs helped level the playing field for disadvantaged youth.
I reviewed the literature regarding the impact of after-school programs. According the findings after-school programs provided a solution to the existing achievement or opportunity gaps that are prevalent in American society. In the next section, I reviewed the literature on after-school program recruitment and retention studies and outlined the key findings in the reviewed studies. I also outlined factors related to recruitment and retention in after-school programs based on the literature review (see Table 2.1).

**Previous Recruitment and Retention Studies**

Many programs, even high quality after-school programs, struggled to obtain consistent participation from high school students (Deschenes et al., 2010). According to TASC (2007), “the strongest school-based high school programs may achieve participation rates that hover around 50 percent” (p.16). Lauver, Little, & Weiss (2004) reported that 15 high school after-school programs in their study had an average attendance of 32% and an attrition rates of 20-40%. The literature stated that regular and sustained participation in high quality after-school programs were one mechanism for addressing these achievement gaps in addition provided positive youth development (Kauh, 2010; TASC, 2007). The researchers outlined specific factors that attracted and sustained youth participation in after-school programs.

In this section, the reviewed literature helped to conceptualize the problem of recruitment and retention in after-school programs, as well as identified the gaps in the extant literature. Although the existing literature offered few recommendations specific to increasing students of color enrollment and sustained participation in high school after-
school programs, there were several studies that addressed this issue for older youth in general.

**Recruitment and retention factors.** Strobel, Kirshner, O’Donoghue, and McLaughlin (2008) examined qualities that attracted and sustained urban youth in after-school programs. The qualitative study included data gathered over a two-year period from focus groups, interviews, and youth ethnographers. They conducted the study at five community-based after-school programs (Beacon centers) in California. The researchers examined features of Beacon youth centers in California that attracted and sustained low-income youth. The study included 44 focus groups interviews (n=120; 22% African American, 19% Latino) and 21 one-on-one interviews with elementary, middle school, and high school students. In the span of five months, teams of youth ethnographers, supervised by an adult, collected and analyzed data from the after-school program sites. Using grounded theory as the method of analysis, the researchers found that factors that attracted and retained youth included relationships with adults, relationships with peers, safety (both physical and emotional), opportunities to learn, and choices in programming (Strobel et al. 2008).

Similarly, Perkins, Borden, Villarruel, Carlton-Hug, Stone, and Keith (2007) found that the opportunity to learn and to be safe were important factors in recruitment and retention. This Michigan based qualitative research study examined why ethnic minority urban youth elected to participate or not participate in after-school programs. Data was collected from community-based after-school programs and included 77 youths (ages 9-19) participating in 11 structured brainstorming sessions. They obtained 344 statements expressing reasons for participating and 353 statements expressing reasons for
not participating. Besides opportunities to learn and to be safe, the researchers found that avoiding boredom and opportunities for fun and engaging activities were factors for recruitment and retention.

Kauh (2010) examined factors that aided in enrollment and retention of older African American and Latino males in after-school programs. This qualitative research study, which also focused on community-based programs, included interviews of 10 program directors of high quality after-school programs that had high rates of recruitment and retention. This study supported the current literature and found that programs which had accessibility, affordability, and flexibility were attractive to young men of color. In addition, Kauh (2010) found that programs that offered stipends, leadership opportunities, rewards, and were in safe and nurturing environments were factors that lead to recruitment and retention.

Most of the studies across the literature mentioned the ability to participate in engaging activities as a factor contributed to recruitment and retention. In general, researchers found that students learned better if they were engaged and interested in the subject (Carini, Kuh, & Klein, 2006; Lippman & Rivers, 2008). Deschenes’ et al. (2010) comprehensive research that examined engaging older youth also cited engaging activities as a contributing factor. One of the goals of their study was to find out the characteristics of after-school programs that had high-participation rates. Through a series of in-depth quantitative analysis of several data sets (MIS participation data, online program survey, site visits to each city, document review, community of practice), the researchers found two distinguishing program practices related to high-retention in
after-school programs: (a) offering of leadership opportunities and (b) having quality staff working together to keep informed about the youth’s lives.

Ferrari and Turner (2006) identified factors for joining and continued participation in after-school programs as fostering relationship with caring adults, learning opportunities (homework assistance), securing a safe environment, providing leadership opportunities, friendships, developing youth, and having fun. They conducted open-ended interviews at a community-based program of predominantly African-American students (n=50; age 5-18). Soetan (2009) research on theories of youth participation found that in order to ensure older youth participation, the students had to have an integral role in the decision-making. In fact, the researcher recommended the following as necessary for youth participation:

- provided effective training and equip them with transferable skills
- recognized and rewards the participation in order to enrich the experience.
- integrated social networking sites to engage youth
- provided frequent and youth-led activities
- monitored and evaluates to measure the effectiveness and provided feedback

There was added nuance when recruiting and retaining students of color. Nasi, McLaughlin, and Jones (2009) argued that students’ of color racial identity affected their academic achievement and the school context played a role in shaping the student’s racial identity and school engagement. In other words, students of color struggled academically in school environments that tracked students, had bureaucratized relationships, had systems that were not transparent, and exhibited racial discrimination. (Nasir, McLaughlin, & Jones, 2009). The adolescent student of color developed across a
multiple contexts (e.g. family, neighborhood, school) (Stanton-Salazar & Spina, 2000). Nasir et al. (2009) further stated that schools that expected students of color to succeed, provided college access information and other supports, fostered positive developmental growth.

Besides a racial/ethnic identity, students of color also maintained a cultural identity that was a factor for recruitment and retention. Woodland (2008) identified safety, opportunity to learn through enriched curriculum, rigorous evaluations, quality staff, relevancy, and family involvement were critical elements that fostered retention in after-school programs for young African American males. Importantly, the researcher also argued that cultural relevancy was one of the distinguishing factors that attract students of color.

Much of the literature supports the outlined factors that contribute to recruitment and retention (Anderson-Butcher, 2005; Dawes & Larson, 2011; Digby & Ferrari, 2005). An additional factor that supported recruitment and retention was the use of incentives (Collins et al., 2008). Collins et al. (2008) reasoned that because high school students were interested in earning money, after-school programs competed with employment opportunities. After-school programs that provided financial incentives met the high school students’ need of earning additional income (Lauver et al., 2004). Additionally, Lauver and Little (2005) stated that there were three vital program features that attracted older youth, which were that they provided (a) an physically and emotionally safe environment, (b) a committed program staff who were supportive, and (c) an age-appropriate activities that were fun and engaging.
**Barriers.** A shared theme across several studies concentrated looking to recruit and retain youth focused on eliminating or minimizing barriers to participation in after-school programs. Weitzman, Mijanovich, Silver, and Brazill (2008) examined the relationship between unmet needs and after-school program participation in five major cities in the United States (Baltimore, Detroit, Oakland, Philadelphia, and Richmond). Between 1998 and 2005, the researchers conducted telephone surveys (random digit dialed) and surveyed parents and youth (n=1293 for parents with children between ages 5-9 and n=3325 for parents with children between ages 10-18). The students and parents provided reasons why they did not participate in after-school programs which were, (a) 29% stated that the youth was busy with homework/other activities; (b) 22% stated that no programs/insufficient programs were available; (c) 21% stated that the youth and/or youth’s friends had no interest;(d) 13% stated transportation as an impediment; and (e) 13% stated that they preferred to have the child at home (Weitzman et al., 2008).

Weisman and Gottfredson (2001) identified several factors that contributed to attrition in after-school programs, one factor was the poorly established communication between program and parents. Parental and family involvement was determined to be a key component in improving attendance rates. Other factors that had been cited in the literature regarding attrition in after-school programs included negative perceptions of the after-school programs (by both parents and students) (Terzian, Giesen&Mbawana, 2009), negative experiences amongst peers (Dworkin & Larson, 2006); negative and aversive staff behavior (Dworkin & Larson, 2006); lack of program consistency (Okeke, 2008); participation in other after-school activities (family or non-family related)(Okeke, 2008);
program length, boredom, and lack of academic support (Okeke, 2008); and unsafe program location (Terzian et al., 2009).

Kennedy et al. (2007) found that the barriers to after-school program were in five distinctive categories, which were, (a) safety, transportation, and cost; (b) family responsibilities; (c) desire or need to work; (d) lack of identification with staff members; and (e) lack of interest in organized activities. Another study that provided a framework that helped conceptualize high school student attrition was the Bridgeland, Dilulio, and Morison (2006) study. The researchers examined the factors that led the decision to drop out of high school and found several factors reported by the participants. The researchers conducted 467 face-to-face interviews in Baltimore and Philadelphia.

The participants were students who had dropped out of high school. The participants were racially and ethnically diverse where 36% were Caucasian, 35% were African American and 27% were Latino. The students shared very specifically as to their reasons for leaving high school. Bridgeland et al. (2006) stated that although there were many factors provided by the participants, the top four significant factors were: (a) disinterested in classes, (b) missed too many days of school, (c) spent time with people who had no interest in school, and (d) lack of restrictions during the day. Table 2.1 summarized the major findings from the literature as to why youth join and stay with after-school programs. The table shows that while there were wide ranges of reasons identified, the most commonly identified were safety, accessibility, and location closely followed by learning opportunities.
Table 2.1

*Findings from Recruitment and Retention Literature*

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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Youth provide input</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Existing conceptual models. Based on the review of literature on after-school programs, enrollment and sustaining engagement was important in order for students to realize the many positive outcomes (Rose-Krasnor, Campbell, Loiselle, Pancer, Busseri, 2003). Researchers created conceptual models that broaden the understanding of youth motivation and engagement, such as rings of engagement (Sullivan, 2011; Sullivan & Saito, 2008) and ladder of participation (Hart, 1992). Sullivan (2011) argued that youth were engaged first by establishing authentic relationships. The researchers theorized that engaging youth was more than using techniques.

![Rings of Engagement model](image-url)

Youth were engaged in various ways (see Figure 3.1) and levels across communities and society and these various constructs yielded a variety of outcomes (Sullivan, 2011). According to the rings of engagement model, four distant factors were vital for youth engagement, which were:

- Participation - youth is participating in various activities formally and informally providing the youth an opportunity to connect with positive experiences
- Passion - youth is intrinsically engrossed in activity
- Voice - youth is able to voice ideas that may have program, practice, and policy implications
- Collective action - youth and adults are sharing in the decision-making

Similar to rings of engagement model, Hart’s (1992) the ladder of participation model argued that youth must have a voice in order to be full participants. Hart (1992) asserted that there were eight varying degrees of participation. Hart (1992) argued that adults sometimes used youth as a “tokens” which disempower and disengage the youth. The ladder of participation model represented a power shift from solely adult to an equal decision-making relationship between adults and youth (Hart, 1992). This dynamics of power and the shift in power, understood by everyone involved, led to authentically engaged youth. Programs that engaged high school students were aware of this power. Hart (1992) conveyed,

Young people’s participation cannot be discussed without considering power relations and the struggle for equal rights. It is important that all young people have the opportunity to learn to participate in programmes which directly affect
their lives. This is especially so for disadvantaged children for through participation with others such children learn that to struggle against discrimination and repression, and to fight for their equal rights in solidarity with others is itself a fundamental democratic right (p. 6).

Hart (1992) contends that some adults manipulated youth into participation, and forced them to attend whether or not they were interested. According to Hart (1992) adults used youth as decoration and the youth were not empowered (see Figure 3.2). Hart (1992) argued that youth made major contributions to society when adults allowed them to have full equity, which required a conscious commitment by adults and youth.

Figure 2.2. Ladder of Participation. Adapted from “Children’s Participation from Tokenism to Citizenship” (p. 8) by R. Hart, 1992, Florence: UNICEF Innocent Research Centre.
Students’ Voice

Although the existing literature revealed a great deal about recruitment and retention, youths’ perspective on reform efforts continued to be missing from much of the literature (Cook-Sather, 2002; Hart, 1992; Gentilucci, 2004). Gentilucci (2004) argued that after years of “objectivist research” United States educational system had not fully understood the importance of the perspectives that influenced student education. Gentilucci (2004) believed education benefitted from by broadening the research on students by understanding the students’ perspective.

The students’ perspectives strengthened school reform efforts according to Noguera’s (2007) study of 150 grade 10 students attending Boston public high schools. For Fletcher (2005), students involved in school reform must be “meaningful” involved, which required student engaged in every facet of school reform efforts and simply not just when students attended a meeting. Pokela, Steblea, Steblea, Shea, and Denny (2007) argued when youth expressed their voice about their needs and preferences, assumptions were eliminated in school program planning.

Corbett and Wilson (1995) argued “under-representation of students’ voices in research and reform was more substantive and which had to do with “generalized ascription of subordinate status to the student role” (p.6). Students voice provided a balancing of power between school authorities, thus students obtain “relational power” in their education (Smyth, 2006). Transformation in schools occurred when, Smyth (2006) argued, students obtained relational power. Relational power referred to when everyone in a group contributed and provided solutions as opposed to unilateral power, which was power over others (Warren, 2005).
Studies found links between lack of students voice and school disengagement, in fact Smyth (2006) argued student dropout rates high schools stemmed from the student’s resistance and reaction to power inequality. Freire (2000) argued that it was only natural for the oppressed to fight against their oppressors. While Smyth (2006) indicated that students felt oppressed in schools because of the lack of students voice, according to Cook-Sather (2002), the authorization of student perspective contradicted current American school reform efforts. Student perspectives allowed “change in mindset and changes in the structures in educational relationships and institutions” (Cook-Sather, 2002, p. 3).

Summary and Conclusion

The case for recruiting and retaining students of color into after-school programs. In summary, after-school programs had a long history in the United States. These programs received significant financial support by both the public and private sector over the last few years, which incited research in this field. The review of the literature revealed that after-school programs provided a vital addition to positive youth development (cognitive, emotional, social, and behavioral) in both encouraging protective factors (self-esteem, cultural competence) and decreasing risk factors (depression, delinquency, drug-use).

Students of color benefited from after-school programs because of the extra supports they received, which potentially addressed issues involving the achievement gaps that existed in the U.S. educational system. Research had provided evidence that after-school programs helped address the achievement gap issues as well as provided a safe and nurturing environment for youth development. In addition, research revealed
the many challenges in recruiting and retaining students of color, especially high school students, in after-school programs. However, there were several factors reported to contribute to the successful recruitment and retention of students (see Table 2.1).

The growing body of literature on student voice indicated that when students are meaningfully involved, they obtained relational power, which empowered students to engage more in the schools. Studies have found positive developmental impacts when students participated in their educational enrichment experience. In addition, the voices students of color provided under-examined cultural perspectives that once understood could lead to even greater engagement. Therefore, student voice played an important role in the designing the methodology of this current study.

The scholarship revealed significant benefits for older youth who participated in after-school programs. By examining what attracted, motivated, and engaged students of color, future strategies for recruitment and retention will improve. This study attempted to ascertain perspectives of students of color in high school, which allowed for a closer examination of recruitment and retention into after-school programs.

It was important to note that I found paucity in the research regarding recruiting and retaining students of color into after-school programs. This gap in the research provided an opportunity for me to explore this issue even further. Thus, the students of color shared their perspectives, often absent in scholarship (Skuza & Russo, 2008). The research created the opportunity for students’ voices to be heard. The students told their story as part of an African tradition that went back to the griots, the African storytellers who played the important role as oral historians.
Chapter 3: Research Design Methodology

General Perspective

The purpose of this study was to examine high school students’ of color perceptions of recruitment and retention in the after-school context. This research study built on the previous works of Schilling (2001) and Ferrari and Turner (2006) that investigated commitment and motivation in after-school programs. Most of the previous studies did not specifically address strategies to increase high school students’ of color participation in after-school programs. In this chapter, I presented an overview of the methodology including an explanation of the characteristics of qualitative research that supported the rationale for the design.

Characteristics of qualitative research. Qualitative research is a form of social inquiry that explores the meaning individuals or groups attribute to a human or social problem or issue (Cohen & Crabtree, 2006; Creswell, 2007; Creswell, 2009). According to Creswell (2007), qualitative research over the last 10 years became more acceptable as “a legitimate mode of inquiry in the social behavioral and health sciences” (p. 2).

Qualitative research emerged from a rich history of a number of different research traditions and human disciplines that continuously evolved from the researcher’s theoretical and philosophical stance (Creswell, 2007; Denzin & Lincoln, 1994). Qualitative research was a viability approach to human inquiry (Angen, 2000; Cohen & Crabtree, 2006; Koro-Ljungberg, 2008)
Table 3.1

Framework of Research Study within the Qualitative Research Literature

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Perspective of the process of inquiry</th>
<th>Rationale with illustrative quotes</th>
<th>This research study</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Paradigm</td>
<td>“…if we are to fully understand the behavior of an 18-year-old delinquent we must understand her view of the world around her. We must also understand the subjective perceptions of her by others in her social and cultural context. Thus, for interpretivists, what the world means to the person or group being studied is critically important to good research in the social sciences” (Willis, 2007, p. 6).</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Underlying philosophy</td>
<td>“…their experiences, as rich as they are, cannot be reduced to statistical tables” (Stanfield, 1994; p.179)</td>
<td>Interpretivist inquiry (Schwandt, 1994; Willis, 2007)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strategy, method, or tradition of inquiry</td>
<td>“Focus groups are a qualitative data collection method effective in helping researchers learn the social norms of a community or subgroup, as well as the range of perspectives that exist within that community or subgroup” (Mack, Woodson, MacQueen, Guest, &amp; Namey, 2005)</td>
<td>Focus Groups (Mack et al., 2005; Morgan, 1997)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The strategy</td>
<td>“…we take these (research) questions out to the field to collect either “words” or “images” (Creswell, 2007, p.43)</td>
<td>Pilot (Janesick, 1994; Kim, 2011; Sampson, 2004)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Data collection and analysis techniques</td>
<td>“We examine the qualitative data working inductively from particulars to more general perspectives” (Creswell, 2007, p.43)</td>
<td>Data collection techniques: Interviews, students’ writings, reflective notes Data analysis techniques: transcribing data (Bailey 2008; Lapadat &amp; Lindsay (1999) thematic analysis (Braun &amp; Clarke, 2006)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Researchers previously used quantitative methods (Deschenes et al., 2010, Herrera & Arbreton, 2003; Lauver, 2004) as well as qualitative methods (Ferrari & Turner, 2006; Kauh, 2010; Perkins et al., 2009; Strobel et al., 2008) to study recruitment and retention factors. I used the interpretivist worldview because this form of inquiry broadened and deepened the knowledge of “what it means to be human in this more-than-human realm” (Angen, 2000). Interpretivists argued that social science were not to be studied the same way as natural science because human beings were swayed by their individual perception of their environment and their “subjective realities” (Willis, 2007).

Willis, Jost, and Nilakanta (2007) stated that the interpretivist paradigm was a combination of rationalism or "as you will see" approach and relativism, in which "reality" as perceived through the lenses of experiences and culture (Willis et al., 2007). In addition to gaining a deeper understanding, the constructivist/interpretivist pedagogy understood that students constructed their own understanding of their world therefore positioning students as actives participants in the creation of their knowledge as opposed to mere recipients of knowledge (Cook-Sather, 2002).

Within the interpretivist paradigm, the researcher's own perspective affected the study (Creswell, 2007; Piantanida and Garman, 1999). Interpretivist understood that the view of the world, including social identities (e.g. gender, racial, ethnic, socioeconomic) was always from within it. The researcher determined what they see or what they erase from view and their perspective was enhanced by the broadening of their textual experiences (Cousin, 2010). Therefore, the data from this study are (re)presented based on students’ of color perspectives and my interpretation of those perspectives (Creswell,
Therefore, my role as researcher was part of the methodological approach. According to Seidman (2006) awareness of positionality is essential, and stated:

The interviewing relationship is fraught with issues of power—who controls the direction of the interview, who controls the results, who benefits. To negotiate these variables in developing an equitable interviewing relationship, the interviewer must be acutely aware of his or her own experience with them as well as sensitive to the way these issues may be affecting the participants. (p.99)

**Pilot study.** I first began with a pilot study (Janesick, 1994; Kim, 2011; Sampson, 2004) of four Latino and three African American high school students who provided consent and were active in after-school programs. None of these students were part of the study I conducted. This pilot allowed me to (a) uncover any issues or obstacles in recruiting participants, (b) engage in a culturally appropriate way, (c) reflect on the significance of the student’s stories, and (d) modify focus group interview protocol (Kim, 2011). In addition, this pilot study assisted me in practicing my moderator techniques. I focused on particular areas of the study that were unclear to me (Janesick, 1994).

The high school students in the pilot discussed some of the reasons why they joined, which were safety, constructive use of time, learning opportunities, and incentives. In additions they shared why they remained in the program, which were for academic improvements, community service, incentives, and peer and adult relationships. I added the writing portion to the study design based on the students’ suggestions. The students’ of color portrayal of recruitment and retention in this pilot study encompassed
components similar to the developmental systems theory in positive youth development (DST) (Lerner et al., 2005), DST emphasized the development of positive assets as a backdrop in understanding what factors motivate and engage youth. Larson (2000) stated that DST is one way to find out how to get older youth’s “fires lit” (p.170). This asset-based approach has led to significant gains in understanding how to engage older youth (Saito, 2009). DST represented a theoretical framework that blended a set of environmental experiences, resources, and opportunities that enhanced the positive outcomes adolescents (Benson & Leffert, 2001).

In the current study, I investigated why older youth of color enrolled in after-school programs and why they continued to participate in these programs. I also aimed to understand possible barriers the students might experience that prevented them from participating. We addressed the following three research questions:

1. What factors do students of color in high school identify as contributing to the recruitment in after-school programs?
2. What factors do students of color in high school identify as contributing to the retention in after-school programs?
3. What factors do students of color in high school identify as barriers to the recruitment and retention in after-school programs?

Research Context

To address the three research questions, I collected and analyzed data from students of color participating in three federally funded college-access high school programs. The three high schools were located in three separate culturally diverse communities in the New York City area. I contacted officials from New York State
Higher Education (HESC), Commission on Independent Colleges and Universities (CICU), and a private college to recommend quality after-school programs that primarily serve students of color. I emailed the recommended program directors to discuss my research, some of which I followed up with a call or visit.

Three after-school programs (ASP) agreed to participate in the study. I asked the adults involved in the program to nominate their most engaged students to participate in this study. I used a purposeful snowball sampling technique (Creswell, 2007) of directors/teachers nomination to identify students known for high participation and engagement. I sent introductory letters and parental consent forms home with the nominees prior to data collection. I invited the parents and students to contact my dissertation team or St. John Fisher College if they had questions by telephone or email. Only students who completed consent forms were able to participate in the study.

I gave the three high schools the pseudonyms of Adams, Brandeis, and Pleasantville to protect the identity of the participants and the school. As Table 3.2 indicated, all three high schools were urban high schools where a majority of the student population originated from an ethnic minority group. Adams High had an equal distribution of the races. There were more Latino students represented in each school than any other race, which was a similar trend reflected in previous studies (Lobo, Flores, & Salvo, 2002; Markert, 2010). The high schools varied in their graduation rates, which Pleasantville High had one of the highest rates in New York State of 88%, followed by Adams High of 77% and Brandeis High of 67%. Brandeis High had the also had the highest population of low-income students which was 86.8% compared to the other high schools who low-income population was approximately 34%.
Table 3.2

Demographics for Adams, Brandeis, Pleasantville High Schools

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Adams</th>
<th>Brandeis</th>
<th>Pleasantville</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Total student population</td>
<td>3454</td>
<td>1351</td>
<td>828</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td># of White students</td>
<td>1089</td>
<td>138</td>
<td>267</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td># of Black students</td>
<td>1004</td>
<td>426</td>
<td>54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td># of Hispanic students</td>
<td>1213</td>
<td>735</td>
<td>483</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td># of Other students</td>
<td>148</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total # of female students</td>
<td>1649</td>
<td>631</td>
<td>404</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total # of male students</td>
<td>1805</td>
<td>720</td>
<td>415</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td># Free/Reduce Lunch recipients</td>
<td>1185</td>
<td>1173</td>
<td>286</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% Free/Reduce Lunch recipients</td>
<td>34.3%</td>
<td>86.8%</td>
<td>34.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Graduation rate</td>
<td>77.0%</td>
<td>67.0%</td>
<td>88.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% of student that dropped out</td>
<td>3.0%</td>
<td>3.0%</td>
<td>1.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% of Students Suspended</td>
<td>9.0%</td>
<td>33.0%</td>
<td>6.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% of Teachers with &lt;3yrs Experience</td>
<td>5.0%</td>
<td>3.0%</td>
<td>2.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ASP population</td>
<td>412</td>
<td>N/A¹</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% of active participants in ASP²</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


¹“N/A” means the data are not available or not applicable
²Based on data provided by program director
Although each high school provided a number of unique after-school program opportunities (i.e. SAT prep, college trips, internship opportunities) for the students, the three ASPs in this study were federal funded college access programs that had a similar mission and served a similar demographic of students. A requirement for this federal grant was that the students served come from low-income households. The ASP fulfilled this requirement by obtaining the free and reduced lunch information provided by the students. The United States government used this free and reduce lunch data as a gauge for income level based on the National School Lunch Act (USDA, 2011).

The mission for all ASPs was to provide information about college access opportunities with hopes to raise the graduation rates as well as to increase college enrollment. The high schools were ethnically and racially diverse. Adams High School had almost an equal number of Latino (N=1213), Caucasian (N=1089), and African American (N=1004) students. Brandeis High School had more Latino (N=735) and African American (N=426) than Caucasian (N=138) students. Pleasantville High School had more Latinos (N=483) and Caucasian (N=267) than African American (N=54).

Adams High School had one of the highest student populations in and around the New York City area. Some of the activities and services offered by Adams High School ASP were: (a) day and overnight college trips, (b) girls leadership training program, (c) ACT and SAT test preps, (d) one-on-one tutoring, (e) quarterly parent/college information sessions, and (f) Saturday Academy at a local college. The total after-school program served 412 students for the 2010-2011 academic school. Approximately 13% of the students who were able to participate attended one or more offered activity during the school year, of which 5% were considered “highly engaged” participants attending at
least 50% of offered activities during the academic year. Adams High had a number of after-school activities available to students. Adams was known for their activities, and their sports program produced professional sports players. The data revealed that 34% of Adams High students were low-income. The 2010 graduation rate at Adams High was 74.5% and 9.0% of the students were suspended. In Adams High, 5.0% of the teaching staff had fewer than 3 years of experience (Local School Directory, 2011).

Brandeis High School was located in a large school district in the New York City area. Some of the activities and services offered by their after-school program are: (a) same day college tours, (b) AP exam prep, (c) ACT and SAT test preps, (d) tutoring, (f) Saturday academy at a local college, and (g) entrepreneurship workshops. Data was not provided about the total number of students in the program and participating in the program. Over the past few years due to budget cuts, Brandeis High lost many of their programs, including art, dance, and drama with recent discussion by the school district to discontinue the sports programs. Brandeis High is located in a high need school district where over 86% were low-income. The 2010 graduation rate at Brandeis High was 67.8% and 33.0% of the students were suspended. In Brandeis High, most of the teachers had experience and 3.0% of the teaching staff had fewer than 3 years of experience (Local School Directory, 2011).

Pleasantville High School was located in a small urban school district in the New York City area. A majority of the students served by Pleasantville High School ASP were Hispanic. The grant allowed a maximum serving population of 50 students a year and Pleasantville High School ASP obtained 100% participation. Approximately 65% of the students have high participation rates. The activities and services offered by
Pleasantville High School ASP were: (a) internship opportunities, (b) day and overnight college trips, (c) career fair, (d) all-female leadership workshop, (e) all-male leadership workshop, (f) Saturday academy at a local college. In addition to the activities and services, Pleasantville High School ASP also provided a $150 stipend every semester for those students who met specific program requirements. Thirty-four percent of Pleasantville High students were low-income. Pleasantville High was selected as an exemplar school in New York State because of their ability to successfully graduate their students. The 2010 graduation rate at Pleasantville High was 88.0% with a 1.0% high school dropout rate. In 2010, 6.0% of the students were suspended. In Pleasantville High most of the teachers were experienced and 2.0% of the teaching staff had fewer than 3 years of experience (Local School Directory, 2011).

Participants

After receiving IRB approval, I sent an introductory email to the recommended after-school program directors and school officials during the month of December 2010. In January 2011, I conducted a pilot study to refine the focus group research with five low-income high school students of color. During the end of March 2011 and the beginning of April 2011, a letter was sent home through a school official. The school officials nominating the students were told that I needed a minimum of 8 and a maximum of 12 students to participate. A total of 28 high school students of color participated in three focus groups held in April 2011. Tables 3.2 through 3.4 show the demographic make-up of the three groups. The students each were assigned a fictitious name to further protect their identities. I wanted to find out about recruitment and retention in these programs from the most informed students, those who were actively and regularly
participating in programs offered by their ASP. To be considered for the study, the students had to meet the following criteria:

- be a student of color
- be currently enrolled high school student
- have documented engagement in at least 50% of the ASP activities during the 2010-2011 school year
- show interest in discussing in a focus group setting, and
- available for at least one hour at a specified date after school hours.

Fifteen of the student participants were in twelfth grade, five were in the eleventh grade, four were in the tenth grade, and 3 were in the ninth grade. All had varying degree of program participation ranging from less than one academic year to almost five academic years of program participation.

Fifteen of the study participants were African American, 11 were Hispanic, and 2 classified themselves as other. Sixteen of the participants were female and 12 were male. The students who participated in this study ranged between 14-19 years old (M = 16.54). Twenty participants attended the ASP for at least three years. Nine of the participants attended the ASP for at least five years. The ASP provided college access opportunities to low-income students. All of the students who had at least three years of participation visited a college campus at least once. Thirteen of the fifteen high school seniors had already applied to a college or university and one of the participants was ranked second in their graduating class. Few of the students were active in school sports.
### Table 3.3

*Demographics for Adams High Participants*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Sex</th>
<th>Race</th>
<th>Grade</th>
<th>Years in ASP</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Crystal</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>L</td>
<td>12th</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aaliyah</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>9th</td>
<td>&lt;1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Diana</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>L</td>
<td>12th</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anthony</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>12th</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Catena</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>11th</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Caprice</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>12th</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nicole</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>11th</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Melody</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>11th</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Frieda</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>10th</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maria</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>L</td>
<td>12th</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note: A= African American; L= Latino; O = Other; All school and participants names are pseudonyms*
Table 3.4

*Demographics for Brandeis High Participants*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Sex</th>
<th>Race</th>
<th>Grade</th>
<th>Years in ASP</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Jeremiah</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>12&lt;sup&gt;th&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cindy</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>O</td>
<td>12&lt;sup&gt;th&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fabian</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>12&lt;sup&gt;th&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Abdul</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>O</td>
<td>12&lt;sup&gt;th&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Blair</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>12&lt;sup&gt;th&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rebecca</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>12&lt;sup&gt;th&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tyrone</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>12&lt;sup&gt;th&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jacob</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>12&lt;sup&gt;th&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kyle</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>12&lt;sup&gt;th&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jackson</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>12&lt;sup&gt;th&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note:* A = African American; L = Latino; O = Other; All school and participants names are pseudonyms.
Table 3.5

Demographics for Pleasantville High Participants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Sex</th>
<th>Race</th>
<th>Grade</th>
<th>Years in ASP</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Susanna</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>L</td>
<td>9th</td>
<td>&lt;1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>George</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>L</td>
<td>10th</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Javier</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>L</td>
<td>10th</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Antonio</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>L</td>
<td>11th</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Katie</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>L</td>
<td>9th</td>
<td>&lt;1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Erina</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>L</td>
<td>12th</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Julian</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>L</td>
<td>10th</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zoe</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>L</td>
<td>11th</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: A = African American; L = Latino; O = Other; All school and participants names are pseudonyms

Data Collection

Focus group. To ascertain the recruitment and retention strategies from the students of color, I used focus group interviews. Focus groups, a qualitative data collection method, effectively assists researchers in understanding the social customs of a community or subgroup as well as to gather a variety of perspectives that exist within that community or subgroup (Mack et al, 2005). Focus groups used group dynamics to elicit detailed information and were one approach to group interviews (Creswell, 2007). Focus groups were beneficial when there was limited time, the interviewee might not be open to share during a one-on-one interview, and interviewees are similar and cooperative with each other (Creswell, 2007; Morgan, 1997).
I used focus groups to interview high school students as opposed to individual interviews because the focus group created a non-threatening environment that promoted both self-discovery and candid conversations (Mack et al., 2005). Although social desirability bias, which was the participant’s propensity to present themselves in alignment with social norms, had the potential to influence focus group interviews (King & Bruner, 2000; Jo, 2000), group interactions are best used when seeking to capture youth experiences (Gurian & Pope, n.d.). Jo (2000) suggested asking both direct and indirect questions to mitigated social desirability bias. Therefore, the focus groups dynamics was appropriate for obtaining factors contributing to recruitment and retention in after-school programs from students’ of color. The environment of a focus group was social exchange, not merely a technique. Thus, I conducted the research with the students as opposed to on the students (Cousin, 2009). Table 3.6 outlined the strengths of focus groups versus in-depth interviews for this study.
Table 3.6

Strengths of Focus Groups versus In-depth Interviews

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Appropriate for</th>
<th>Strength of method</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Focus Groups</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Identifying group norms</td>
<td>Elicits information on a range of norms and opinions in a short time</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eliciting opinions about</td>
<td>Group dynamic stimulates conversation, reactions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>group norms</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Discovering variety within</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a population</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interviews</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eliciting individual</td>
<td>Elicits in-depth responses, with</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>experiences, opinions,</td>
<td>nuances and contradictions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>feelings</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Addressing sensitive topics</td>
<td>Gets at interpretive perspective, i.e., the connections and</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>relationships a person sees</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>between particular events,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>phenomena, and beliefs</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Kennedy, Kools, and Krueger (2001) suggested three benefits of conducting focus groups with students were (a) encouraged group involvement, (b) facilitated self-
disclosure and decreased self-consciousness with a peer audience, and (c) modeled acceptance of students own language and statements.

Morgan (1997) stated that the way a researcher assessed to see if using focus groups was an appropriate approach was to determine how easily and actively the participants would be willing to discuss the research topic. Focus groups allowed researchers to expand their options when matching the research questions to the qualitative methods (Morgan, 1997). Strobel et al. (2008) used focus groups in their qualitative research on recruitment and retention of urban youth. They stated that focus groups allowed the researcher to learn from a large sample pool of youth while permitting room for substantive dialogue. Because there is a paucity of research with regard to recruitment and retention factors from the students’ of color perceptive, focus groups were an ideal approach for this research study. The focus groups empowered the youth by providing comfort and opportunity for input and dialogue, as well as having students work together in a positive collaborative environment.

Two of the focus groups were held at the ASP program site in the high school and one at an off-site location. Having experienced directing after-school programs and teaching youth, I served as moderator. I greeted all participants to put them at ease (Gibson, 2007), informed the participants about the study, directed them to complete a brief demographic form (name, age, grade, race, sex), invited them to partake in the pizza and soda lunch, and signed and collected all parental permission slips and assent forms. I followed a semi-structured interview protocol which contained modified questions adapted from Schilling (2001) and Ferrari and Turner (2006). The interview protocol was designed to elicit specific descriptions of recruitment and retention. To effectively
facilitate this focus, encourage positive group dynamics, and build rapport, I begun with
ground rules adapted from (Mack et al., 2005):

- Whatever we say here stays here
- Speak one person at a time so we can hear everyone’s contribution clearly in
  this room and later on the tape
- Feel free to express your thoughts; there are no “wrong answers” and
  everyone is to treat each other with the utmost respect

In the literature, ice-breakers were considered appropriate and useful when
interviewing youth (Gibson, 2007). The participants’ desks were arranged in a circle and
I asked each of the students to state their name, age, grade, and let us know what their
plans were for the future were. This ice-breaker was age appropriate for high school
students and allowed for free flow of communication (Gibson, 2007). The participants
were asked a series of questions adapted from Ferrari and Turner (2006) research on
older youth recruitment and retention as depicted in Appendix D. I further built rapport
with the participants by asking two open-ended questions with the objective of getting all
the students comfortable and engaged (Mack et al., 2005). The first question I asked was
if they had a friend who was thinking about joining the ASP how would they describe the
program and what would their friend need to know before they came to the program.

Later, I asked the participants to explain why they started coming to the ASP. I
also asked probing questions such as “Can you tell me more?” and “Can you please
elaborate?” in order to have the participants expand their answers as well as gain a deeper
and clearer understanding of what they were saying (Mack et al., 2005). Next,
participants were asked to describe why they kept coming back and if they planned on
attending the ASP in the future. I asked them to be specific and if they were seniors and not returning to the high school I asked them if they would come back if they had the opportunity to do so.

In order to find out about barriers to recruitment, I asked why their peers stopped coming or never came to ASP. I encouraged the student to elaborate whenever possible and encouraged everyone to be a part of the conversation. I then asked if they were committed to the ASP they attended and what might have prevented them from becoming committed to the ASP. My last question had several parts. One part was if they were given money to design an after-school program where would the program be, what kinds of activities would the program include, what would they spend the money on, and lastly what would be the most important activities in their ASP. I also gave indirect probes such as “I see” and “uh huh” to encourage continuous dialogue (Mack et al., 2005). Every group had one or two students more talkative then most and one or two students less conversational. I was able to solicit perspectives from all of the students of color. All of the focus group interviews were tape recorded on at least two recording devices.

**Student writings.** Next, I distributed writing materials for the participants to reflect and write about their “ideal” after school program. The multifaceted question I asked was for them to reflect on designing the ideal an after-school program that will attract and sustain high school students. I asked them to describe the location specific activities and services they would provide that would engage students their age. These questions were based on last interview question found in Appendix D. All of the students participated in this writing exercise, and I received 28 writing pieces. This allowed me to obtain an even deeper understanding of what kinds of after-school program would attract
high school students. I later used these writings along with my reflective and field notes to triangulate the findings. The participants spent approximately 40 minutes of the 60 minutes interviewing session discussing recruitment and retention factors and another ten minutes of writing. The primary research questions about recruitment, retention, and barriers were discussed in the beginning, middle, and end of the focus group interviews.

**Reflective notes.** During the interviewing process, I composed field notes, noting primarily anything I found pertinent or may not be able to transcribe such as nods of agreements, participant tapping another participant on the arm, or interview seating arrangements. In addition, immediately after each focus group interview, I wrote in my reflective notebook. These notes assisted me when I was transcribing and conducting analysis. I reflected on my thoughts about the interview, my positionality, and my discoveries. This writing enabled me to embrace the process in a meaningful way. Reflective writing was widely supported in pedagogical literature (McGuire, Lay, & Peters, 2009; Smith & Jack, 2005). Dewey’s (1910) defined reflective as “active, persistent, and careful consideration of any belief or supposed form of knowledge in the light of the grounds that support it and the further conclusions to which it tends” (p. 6, as cited in McGuire et al., 2009).

**Data Analysis**

I transcribed verbatim the focus group interviews, participants’ writings, and post-interview reflective writings, taking notice of any verbal cues such as interruptions, inflections, pauses, and laughter (Davidson, 2009). Lapadat and Lindsay (1999) argued that the transcription process itself is a form of research methodology. Bailey (2008) concurred further stating, “representation of audible and visual data into written form is
an interpretive process which is therefore the first step in analyzing data” (p. 127). According to Lucas (2010) transcribing the text should not be overlooked because the process was powerful tool in qualitative research.

The interviews were transcribed using pseudonyms in addition to excluding any identifiable characteristics. The transcripts and tapes were sent to a third party professional to review to ensure transcription accuracy then analyzed using thematic analysis procedures outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006). Thematic analysis is a process in which patterns and themes are analyzed and reported (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Braun and Clarke (2006) asserted that this form of analysis provides the researcher the freedom and flexibility to provide a rich and detailed account of the data.

Thematic analysis was a more straightforward approach to presenting and analyzing interview data (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Seidman, 2006). Thematic analysis is not strictly bounded in a specific framework (Braun & Clark, 2006) thus offered flexibility and accessibility when analyzing my data. Additionally, thematic analysis allowed me to capture the students’ lived experiences. van Manen (1990) argued that in thematic analysis, the themes were considered the “structures of experiences”. Therefore, when researchers analyzed a phenomenon, they were “trying to determine what the themes are, the experiential structures that make up that experience” (van Manen, 1990, p. 5). I created an extensive list of sub-themes that reflected the students’ of color perspective. This process allowed for analyzing the statements in its cultural context, so when a student stated they were “tight”, I understood that meant “upset” in the context of discussion. Analysis occurred in six phases based on Braun and Clark’s (2006) framework outlined in Table 3.8.
Table 3.7

**Phases of Thematic Analysis**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Phase</th>
<th>Description of the process</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Familiarize</td>
<td>Transcribing data (if necessary), reading and rereading the data, noting initial ideas</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Generate</td>
<td>Coding interesting features of the data in a systematic fashion across the entire data set, collating data relevant to each code.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Search</td>
<td>Collating codes into potential themes, gathering all data relevant to each potential theme</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Review</td>
<td>Checking if the themes work in relation to the coded extracts (Level 1) and the entire data set (Level 2), generating a thematic ‘map’ of the analysis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Define</td>
<td>Ongoing analysis to refine the specifics of each theme, and the overall story the analysis tells, generating clear definitions and names for each theme.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Produce</td>
<td>The final opportunity for analysis. Selection of vivid, compelling extract examples, final analysis of selected extracts, relating back to the analysis to the research question and literature, producing a scholarly report of the analysis</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note. Phases of thematic analysis Adapted from “Using thematic analysis in psychology” by V. Braun and V. Clarke, 2006, Qualitative Research in Psychology 3, p. 77 – 101.*
Thematic analysis. The analysis of the data involved six phases. The first phase required becoming familiar with the data. This phase of the analysis required listening and reading all of the transcripts (focus groups, writings, field notes, and reflective notes) several times. I also analyzed the participants’ statements that were in response to my probing statements or made extemporaneously without the probes.

The second phase I proceeded to do line-by-line coding across all of the data sets and systematically begun a collation of data relevant to a specific code. For example, phrases such as “it was a good opportunity for me to do my homework and stuff” was coded as “academic preparedness.” I assigned all phrases that related to homework assistance, SAT preparation, review for AP exam this “academic preparedness” code. Some of the participants’ statements I gave the academic preparedness code were:

- “I started coming to ASP specifically because like what everyone said, they help you with tutoring”
- “Um, it helps you get prepared. Like I have a lot of hard classes, and I need help and stuff. I take AP chemistry and math class needs a lot of effort and time”
- “She was going over it with me and the other people in the class and it kinda like help me even though I didn't know anything from global one and I had to remember it. She actually helped me. And I actually passed my global regents!”

Another researcher read and coded the transcribed data line-by-line. Once we reached an agreement about the sub-themes for one data set, we used these sub-themes to code all of the participants’ responses to my interview questions. Based on the coding of
all of the data, 28 sub-themes were uncovered. I wrote a brief summary statement for each of the 28 sub-themes.

During the third phase, I organized the sub-themes into broader themes which I referred to as “concepts” as reflected in Figures 3.1 through 3.5. For example, the concept social connectedness includes the sub-themes that were captured as factors related to recruitment and retention:

- Building relationships with adults
- Building relationships with peer
- School support systems
- Community and civic engagement
- Cultural relevance
- Engaged and nurturing staff

*Figure 3.1. Sub-themes to marketing concept.*
Incentives

Trips

Saving Money

Rewards/Gifts

Financial Incentives

Figure 3.2. Sub-themes to incentives concept.

Development of Youth

Student Voice

Academic Achievement

Awareness of Potential

Exposure to new experiences

Leadership Opportunities

Development of skills

Figure 3.3. Sub-themes to development of youth concept.
Activities & Services

- Learning Opportunities
- Internship opportunities
- Engaging
- Useful and Relevant
- Breadth of program activities

**Figure 3.4.** Sub-themes to activities and services concept.

Social Connectedness

- Cultural relevance
- Engaged and nurturing staff
- Building relationship with peers
- Community and civic engagement
- Building relationship with adults
- School support systems

**Figure 3.5.** Sub-themes to social connectedness concept.
In the fourth phase, I reviewed the concepts along with my research and dissertation committee to ensure the sub-themes and concepts were relational. The codebook started to become refined. During the fifth phase, analysis continued, and I clearly defined the concepts. I conducted a final review of all of the themes and concepts, to see if I missed any sub-themes or if a major concept was not uncovered (Bazeley, 2009). The sixth and final phase was when I selected the compelling examples, relating back to my research questions and literature review. These are discussed in Chapter 4. I entered all of the transcription data into a Microsoft Excel file to assist with coding, sorting, and summarizing.

Importantly, unlike the positivists who structure their study on ensuring internal and external validity, reliability, and objectivity, interpretivist deliberate in terms of trustworthiness (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994). Creswell (2009) illustrated eight strategies for enhancing the trustworthiness of qualitative research, three of which I used in this current study:

- Triangulation
- Member checking
- Rich, thick describing of findings
- Bias clarification
- Negative case analysis
- Prolonged engagement
- Peer debriefing and support
- External auditing
**Triangulation.** I triangulated three different data sources. The sub-themes and concepts were revealed from the coming together of all three data sources. I used multiple forms of evidence and perspectives to gain clearing understanding (Wiggins, 1998). Researchers confirmed that when various kinds of confirmations were used to in the analysis process, the better understanding the researcher had of the phenomenon (George Mason University, 2011).

![Diagram of triangulation method]

*Figure 3.6. Triangulation method.*

**Prolonged engagement.** I spent over 200 hours in the after-school program field. I spent time with the students and program directors. I also presented in a state, national, and international conferences and spoke with colleagues recruiting and retaining challenges of students of color in their after-school programs.

**Peer debriefing and support.** Three qualitative research experts with earned doctorates and a focus group specialist with an earned doctorate provided feedback and input regarding methodological design. The sub-themes and broader concepts were discussed and constantly refined to gain clarity of the students’ perspectives. The peer
debriefing process included questions regarding the study as well as my personal growth process as a researcher.

Summary

There are a number of ways to collect and analyze data to answer research questions. The constructivist/interpretivist approach is an appropriate method to analyze students’ perspectives. I used the thematic analysis method to analyze the focus group data, students’ writings, and my field and reflective notes made post-interview. The students of color provided rich data that went through six phases in this analysis process. Seidman (2006) referred to the thematic analysis approach as being a “dialectical” process, stating “the participants have spoken, and now the interviewer is responding to their words, concentrating his or her intuition and intellect on the process. What emerges is a synthesis of what the participant has said and how the researcher has responded” (p. 127). This approach to the data was comprehensive in its scope as well as flexible in its nature.

In addition to interpreting the data, I reviewed the writings and notes. I used Microsoft Excel to assist with coding, sorting, and summarizing the data. This chapter explained the methods used in the interpretive qualitative study to understand what students of color perceive to be the reasons they enrolled and continue their participation in an after-school program. The next chapter I presented the results achieved with the use of the described methods.
Chapter 4: Results

Introduction

In this chapter, I reported the findings of this study that examined factors related to recruitment and retention of students of color in high school after-school programs. When appropriate, I used verbatim quotations to provide an illustration, to deepen understanding, and to enable the students’ voice within the text (Corden & Sainsbury, 2006). I described in detail in this chapter the concepts, broad themes that emerged from students’ descriptions of their experiences. In the reported results, I presented factors that were mentioned the most frequently by the participants across all three groups as revealed by the coded focus group interviews, student writings, and reflective notes.

Findings

From the analysis of the data, the students of color identified five concepts—marketing, incentives, development of youth, activities/services, and social connectedness as factors that contributed to high school after-school program recruitment and retention. The students also revealed that the lack of these concepts hindered participation with these programs. I separated this chapter sections based on my research questions: (a) factors contributing to recruitment, (b) factors contributing to retention, and (c) factors hindering recruitment and retention. In addition, I provided a summary of the contributing factors in Tables 4.1 through 4.3.
Factors Contributing to Recruitment

The students revealed various reasons why they joined the ASP. Most of the students joined because they were recruited directly by the school, family, and peers. The other factors that attributed to recruitment specifically are discussed in this section.

Marketing

The largest number of students attributed recruitment in high school after-school programs to marketing. Marketing is the activity and processes for creating, communicating, delivering, and exchanging offerings that have value for students, parents, schools, stakeholders, and community at large (American Marketing Association, 2011). Most of the youth reported that directed outreach from family, peers, and school faculty influenced in their decision to join.

There were several aspects to marketing in the after-school context such as direct (e.g. peer outreach) and indirect (e.g. flyer or intercom announcement) recruitment as well as the use of digital technology (e.g. social networking, email, and text) to get information to the students of color. Another aspect to marketing was the ASP’s ability to build a positive brand image and brand awareness. Lastly, marketing involved finding a good location that was accessible and safe for the high school students. The findings showed that the marketing efforts of the after-school program enabled the high school students of color to learn about the existence of the program in addition to what the after-school program offered specifically.

Family recruitment. Outreach from family members, particularly siblings and cousins and not parents, was frequently voiced as the way the students heard about and eventually joined the program. Recruitment by a member was identified as a contributing
factor across all three focus groups. Erina, a 17 year old senior from Pleasantville High said it was an older cousin who told her about the ASP. Erina pointed to Susanna, a high school freshman, who was the older cousin’s sister. Susanna joined in and explained,

Well, my sister was in the program so…like… I already knew (about the ASP). Erina is my cousin, so I already knew about the program in advance, of course. So like…and… I just knew how helpful it was for her (her sister). She went to a really good college.

The students shared that direct outreach of a family member was an effective recruiting strategy because that member was able to provide firsthand experience and in-depth knowledge about the ASP. More importantly, the students were able to see the positive outcomes (i.e. college enrollment) based on that family member’s participation. Chuckling, Catena a 17 year old eleventh grade student at Adams High tapped her sister sitting next to her and said “Well, I’m actually here because I started to follow Caprice.” Caprice, a senior who received a college acceptance letter from a small New York State private college, nodded her head in agreement. Frieda, a distant relative of Caprice and Catena, was also encouraged to join by Caprice.

At Pleasantville High, two other students, who were also cousins, voiced that a family member talked to them about joining the ASP. The cousins, George, a 16 year old tenth grade student, and Zoe, a 16 year old eleventh grade student, signed up because of George’s older brother. George explained his recruitment this way:

If my brother didn't join...he told me about the program, I probably wouldn't think about college that much. I probably wouldn't be as serious about my grades. I
probably would be extremely lazy. So, it's kind of like motivation may. It makes me think what would happen if I didn't go to college.

George, along with other participants throughout all three focus groups, insisted that family members were great influencers. Zoe, his cousin, was grateful that her cousin told her about the ASP, especially because she was new to the school and did not know anyone but George. George went on and said,

Um, when I was about 10 or 11 my brother joined the program and he was telling me about it, which ASPs and there were opportunities and stuff. My brother actually ended up going to (names a university). So he's in his junior year there. And…uh…me being the younger brother, I do not want to be like my older brother….I want to do it better too

Like George, Blair, a twelfth grade female art student, was recruited by her brother. She explained that her brother went to Brandeis High and told her about all of the great after-school programs available at the high school. Having an older sibling introduce the younger student to the opportunity made the transitioning into high school easier. Blair stated she learned about most of opportunities after-school from her brother because “he told me about the different clubs that they had.” Blair also mentioned that she heard about the ASP “from my friends.” Peer recruitment was also a viable recruiting strategy and is discussed in the next section.

**Peer recruitment.** Peer recruitment and school staff recruitment was also frequently given as reasons the students joined the ASP. Similar to family recruitment, peer and school staff recruitment was voiced across all of the focus groups. The majority of the students who mentioned peer recruitment said that joining the ASP was an
opportunity to “hang-out” with their friends after-school. Crystal and Aaliyah from Adams High talked about how the time was very limited during the day and after-school was the best time to be with friends. Jeremiah, an African American Ivy-League bound twelfth grade student from Brandeis High, pointed to his friend Cindy and stated “Like, I came to the school in tenth grade and all of a sudden I was thrown into ASP because people (pointing to Cindy) were talking about it.”

School recruitment. Schools played an essential role in recruitment according to the findings. Out of the 28 students of color in the focus groups, fifteen (54%) attributed joining in part because of the school requests, nine (32%) mentioned family recruitment, and three (14%) mentioned recruitment by peers. The students mentioned that they trusted the school, so when they were approached by the school, they immediately signed up. Kyle, a senior at Brandeis High, was unsure how he exactly “got put on the list” and stated “Um, when it (ASP) started, it was like a list of teachers. And, I guess the principal probably did it, because with the teachers, we were already assigned to them.” Some students however, deliberated about the decision to join, but were happy they said “yes to the opportunity.” For instance, Antonio, in eleventh grade, said joining ASP changed his life and if it was not for a teacher, he would not be college bound.

I just came here in ninth grade and after math class one day a student pulled me over and said the teacher wants to talk to you. She was talking about college and this program. And then...you know…if I could look at it, and if I wanted to join. So I brought it to my mom, me and my mom went over it, and we thought it was good for me to do it.
Incentives

In addition to marketing, there were other factors that contributed to student recruitment. Incentives were also important to the high school students of color. Every focus group mentioned the incentives that the ASP provided as additional reasons they enrolled. The ASP, federally mandated to serve a low-income populations, offered a variety of incentives that differed between Adams, Brandeis, and Pleasantville High. According to the findings, college trips and saving money were factors that lead to recruitment.

**College trips.** Every focus group mentioned trips to colleges and universities as part of the reason why they joined the ASP. All of the groups had positive experiences with the college trips. Students joined realizing that the college trips were more than just a trip. Several students mentioned that not incurring the expense of the college trips was a way they “saved money.” Jacob, who stated he was one of the “most active” high school students in the ASP, shared that the trips were a way to network with peers in other schools. Jackson, from Brandeis High, expressed he joined because he did not know anything about college, In response to having the opportunity to join, he said “I'm all in it!” Blair, a senior at Brandeis High, said she did not want to join at first but realized that she “needed direction” and enrolled into the ASP especially because of the trips. The college trips were the incentive she needed.

Um, ASP basically helped me realize what I want to do in life. When I went…umm… to UCONN… I like the school! I decided I wanted to do biochem. So it was like…a uh uh program that helps you realize what you want to do later on.
**Saving money.** Out of the three high schools, the participants at Brandeis High, where 86.8% of the students receive free or reduced lunch, mentioned saving money the most as a factor for joining. Fabian was enthusiastic when he declared the ASP to be “…a very amazing program which helps us save a lot of money, on visiting colleges, and especially if we are very very interested in going to the school.” Jeremiah jumped in and stated that the ASP does not just help with saving money, but allows you to avoid wasting money and stated “I just save $70 bucks on application fees and didn't have to waste applying for college I may not like.” Crystal, a senior from Adams High stated, “I can’t afford private tutoring. Here, I just get it for free.”

**Development of Youth**

There were several aspects of development of youth that were mentioned during the focus groups; however, the only one that was discussed specifically as a factor that contributed to recruitment was the development of skills. Wilson-Simmons (2007) defined development of youth as a time where “adolescents move from being taken care of to taking care of themselves and others”

**Development of skills.** According to the findings, ASP nonacademic offerings attracted high-school students of color. As George stated, “…this program, I guess, it teaches you... a lot of social skills” which was very appealing to the high school students. Erina, thinking about why she joined, asserted that the ASP was “helpful for interviews before we go into college.” Nicole, a high school junior, said she was attracted to nonacademic ASP opportunities to acquire and develop new skills. Nicole insisted that in the ASP “you kind of learn, you learn...you learn...well. In some of the after-school
programs, you learn etiquette, how to be...act in social situations. So even though some after-school programs help academically, there is help outside of (academics) too.”

**Activities and Services**

The quality of activities and services that is offered by the ASP impacted both recruitment and retention. According to a number of the students in the focus group, many of the students joined because the activities and services were “on point” and met their needs. The students voiced that they enrolled because they wanted to get more involved in activities that helped them academically.

**Learning opportunities.** In this study, learning opportunities ranged from tutoring and homework assistance to SAT preparation and advanced placement review. Some of the students found the ASP to be a place where they learned in a safe environment. Several of the student stated that time in the classroom during school was too short to learn the amount of information needed to pass an exam. Christal joined because of the accessibility of the academic tutors and stated, “so if I'm struggling with any subject. I...umm , you know, I just come.” In addition, the participants mentioned that during the school day students are embarrassed to let their classmates know they are unclear about an assignment or problem. They are attracted to the after-school environment because there is “no judgment”. Jacob explained the benefits of the after-school environment.

You have your quiet time (in ASP)... time you get to cement more things into your mind… you might have some questions in class, everyone is not as comfortable asking. That… I think we feel pressure, sometimes, in a class
situation. After-school is where they can get that private time, ask questions, and not feel foolish about it. Although you're really not foolish if you have questions. The students across all three groups expressed feeling academic “pressure” and if it was not for the ASP they did not know what they would have done. From Adams High, Anthony, a 17 year old senior, conveyed that he was “specifically struggling in the subject such as math or English”. In Pleasantville, Javier stated, “I was a bad student. Um…grades weren't so good. Mom didn't really take a look at my tests, because I really had no reason to show her 50s or 60s.” The students overwhelming expressed that the personal attention provided by the ASP was a factor for joining. Blair, at Brandeis High, stated,

Um, it helps you get prepared. Like I have a lot of hard classes, and I need help and stuff. I take AP chemistry and math class needs a lot of effort and time. So when I come after school, it's like, I get a one-on-one I don't get in regular class. All of the students expressed interest in doing well academically and found the ASP attractive because of this opportunity to learn. Many saw the ASP as a way to get "a leg up" and “ahead of the game.” Many of the seniors expressed the experience of academic pressure and that college is “right around the corner”. Aaliyah, a freshman, also felt pressured to do well academically and did not realize how challenging high school was.

I started coming to ASP, because, umm…when you come to high school. It's like some classes are like harder than you think they are going to be. And so me and my friend come sometimes to like talk to the tutors about the homework. And like the tutors try to make it as less awkward as they can. So it's not like you're
just sitting there. They teach you how to do it. So when you're in class, you know how to do it!

**Duration.** The findings also revealed that students who were recruited early (seventh through ninth grade) increased the likelihood for joining the program. For instance, Javier, a 16 year old tenth grade student from Pleasantville, displayed excitement when talking about his recruitment process stating that being approached by a school staff in middle school was when “I got my opportunity.” At Adams High, Maria, a senior who attended the ASP for six years, stated,

I started coming to ASP because I heard it… I heard it in middle school. Um, I would always walk by the office in the middle school and when I was walking by, there was this lady who would pull me in. And later on, she starts becoming our best friends…

**Social Connectedness**

Social connectedness received the second largest number of responses, behind marketing, as a factor contributing to recruitment. Social connectedness refers to positive the relationships students of color developed with peers, adults, schools staff, community, and ASP staff. A sub-theme that was voiced by the students was the ability to culturally connect with others. Building relationship with peers was the most frequently mentioned factor.

**Building relationship with peers.** For these high school students, the ASP provided the opportunity to connect with friends and meet new people. The students indicated that during the day, teachers “get upset” when students talk to each other and
found the ASP to be one of the few opportunities to “catch up” with their classmates. For instance, Melody, when probed to explain further the dynamics in school said,

Well, its…sort of, its limit it during school, because the teachers will go…"stop talking". But, people at after-school programs…you have a lot of more free time, a lot of more time to talk, so it's like spread out...

The students again mentioned that they were not “judged” in the ASP. They could talk, learn and connect. The ASP allowed them to connect with youth from other cultures. Crystal, president of the Hispanic Club, stated, “So, we also like talk about diversity and racism in our own culture and all these different stuff so that just....” Crystal also stated she joined because at the ASP “you have your friends around you so. It's not like you're alone.” Nicole, who is the only child in her family, “loved” the social connections. She stated, “I feel like I enjoy after-school programs because they give me a chance to socialize with my peers.” Stephanie and Kimberly, sitting next to each other, were both freshmen at Pleasantville High. They agreed that they joined the ASP so they could “hang out” with one another. The finding also revealed a distinction between joining because of “peer recruitment” and joining because of wanting to build “relationship with peers.” The students defined the former being reactive and the latter more “proactive”.

The students discussed the daily challenges they faced in their neighborhood, and the experience of being surrounded by peers who are negative influences. They joined the ASP to have the opportunity to be around positive students. Jackson, from Brandeis High, said the youth in his neighborhood “won't do nothing with their life.” Antonio described that the youth in his former neighborhood “steal and stuff, they join gangs and
stuff, I know because they wanted me to do it too. I mean, I come up here (ASP) and I see a big difference.”

Cindy, a senior at Brandeis who is graduating the top of her class, discussed how an individual was surrounded by positive peers in the ASP.

Okay, (the ASP is) not only about the college readiness but it also brings us together. All of us here we started freshman year together in this program and we here graduating together again. So, when you get surrounded by the right people that have the same goals as unit that helps you accomplish that stuff. We're all college-bound right here and...and we're going to do amazing in the future.

Table 4.1

*Factors Contributing to Recruitment*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Concept</th>
<th>Sub-theme</th>
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<td></td>
<td>Peer recruitment</td>
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<td>School recruitment</td>
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<td>Incentives</td>
<td>Trips</td>
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<td>Saving Money</td>
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<td>Development of Youth</td>
<td>Development of Skills</td>
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<tr>
<td>Activities and Services</td>
<td>Learning Opportunities</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Duration</td>
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<tr>
<td>Social Connectedness</td>
<td>Building relationships with peers</td>
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</table>
Factors Contributing to Retention

The students revealed that the reasons they joined the ASP were not necessarily the same reasons they stayed. In fact, there were only three of the 28 sub-themes that mentioned as both a significant factor contributing to recruitment and retention: (a) trips, (b) building relationships with peers, and (c) learning opportunities. The other factors that attributed to retention specifically are discussed in this section. For instance, Caprice stated the all aforementioned factors and said,

Well, I started ASP in the sixth grade. So it's not new to me. I've always been here. It helps you with my homework a lot cause I find that after I leave the classroom, I still need help with the work with the schoolwork so that's why I keep coming. My friends are here. And we have like good opportunities. We like, visit colleges, is have fun trips with you.

Marketing

The findings revealed that marketing, in general, did not contribute significantly with regard to retention. In fact, the students revealed that the marketing efforts decreased significantly once students were enrolled. The prominent sub-theme expressed was digital technology.

Digital technology. During the beginning of every focus group interview, I asked the participants to turn their cell phones on vibrate. Although no one answered their phones, I recorded in my field notes that 11 of the 28 participants’ cell phones vibrated during the focus group interviews. Furthermore seven students immediately started texting after the interview was over. The students mentioned the used digital technology (e.g. social networking, email, text) as a way to connect with others in the ASP. For
example, Javier wanted to let his ASP friends stay connected to the program and used technology to inform them about upcoming events. Chuckling, he stated,

I think I'm very committed since the first day. Cause, uh, I think my lovely friends know that I text them when there is an event, I Facebook them when there is an event, I see them in school. I remind them like 20 times before the event even comes up. And, you know, a few told me they are getting a little annoyed by it.

Another way digital technology helped with retention was through e-learning technology. Two of the focus groups mentioned the ASP investing in an on-line SAT preparatory course. The students mentioned that they were thrilled about the new technology and that “a lot” of students used the program. This on-line program required the students practice daily. George explained, “and now they have…we have an online SAT program that we take about like six questions every day and... short but is supposed to help you in the long run.”

Many of the students did not have internet services in their home. Therefore, the students conveyed that allowing this service to be available in the after-school program was beneficial. Students who signed up for this program would go to the ASP location every day and for 6 minutes received 6 SAT test questions over the internet. The students found that program engaging and worked with their busy schedule. Many of the students used the program at the ASP due to the inability to practice at home.
Incentives

The students indicated across all three groups that incentives were a motivator for retention. The students reported trips as contributing to continued participation; however they also mentioned rewards, financial incentive, and food as factors.

Rewards. The students cited rewards as a reason they continued to participate. All three ASPs provided rewards, although the prizes varied. When probed about the incentives, several of the students at Pleasantville High at once stated, "That's motivation for us!" Jacob, at Brandeis High, stated it is worth participating in the ASP because “I've got calculators, USBs, all these different types of things that the program funds and gives to me as rewards for being active. So, it pays off.” The students reported that they “enjoy” and “appreciate” the rewards. “I like free stuff,” Fabian a senior at Brandeis High exclaimed. “Like what Jacob said, we get a lot of things, like a Kindle… I mean, I have like five or ten….five to ten flash drives.” The students clarified that the incentives were not the only reason they continue to participate but it was “nice” to receive.

Development of Youth

Development of youth was a concept that emerged as a factor of retention. Many of the participants stated they continued to attend the ASP because they were motivated to do well in school. The ASP provided them a place to refine and enhance their skills. Two of the most mentioned factors were awareness of potential and accountability.

Awareness of potential. Across the focus groups, students stated the ASP helped them realize they had great potential. Javier explained he lived in a single parent household and was the oldest child. He stated,
This (ASP) program... when I first got into it. I didn't um, I didn't see myself trying my best. Or actually participating that much. But uh after...after the summer program, I realize, wow. It helped me a lot to understand what I'm going to learn all these curriculums. I thought I was going to struggle...

Students stated they kept coming back because they were experiencing positive youth development. Catena claimed she constantly participated because she was aware “not all of us get this opportunity.” Diana, a 16 year old graduating senior at Adams High with Catena, added, “It helps you not only academically, but also helps you like for your future. It helps you plan out your future. In a way that if you were speaking to another adult. You will be able to break it down.” Having the ability to communicate effectively and “break it down” was cited by several participants. Almost all of the participants who were seniors mentioned they were aware of the college process because of the ASP and kept returning to hone those decision-making skills. For instance, Jacob stated he became aware of having the ability to make crucial life decisions.

I got to see these colleges I got to know what I wanted and what I didn't want. Because when it came down to narrowing down what schools are like it helped immensely. They (ASP) provide me with so many things that I bet it probably wouldn't have gotten otherwise

The students described feeling inspired by the ASP. The students cited numerous times that the ASP helped them realize their potential. A few described how they enjoyed the challenge. Aaliyah stated,

When I first started coming, I noticed that my grades were like going up at a constant level, because the tutors were like helping me. And telling me what I
should do, and like easy ways to get the stuff like in math and like how to remember stuff, in global and English and science. So, it kept like on helping me so I keep wanting to come back, to keep my grades up because it's going to help me later on.

The participants discussed how the ASP prepared them for the future. They stated the importance of preparing early for life after high school. Within the context of development of youth, awareness of potential was frequently cited as a factor that contributed to retention. Erina said,

Basically, because like I was a little nervous like about going into high school and stuff like that. The ASP program was definitely nice to have especially throughout the years and stuff like that. (ASP made a) difference to prepare for high school. Especially the first year, before ninth grade started... it just prepares you.

Activities and Services

The participants expressed that the activities and services provided by ASP was critical to continued participation. If the programs were not engaging to the youth they stated they would be “out”. They cited a number of reasons why they remained in the program; many of which had to do with the activities and services provided. They specified that the program not only had to be engaging, but had to be useful and relevant. They described useful and relevant by comparing themselves to middle school youth. They stated that their needs were different in high school, and what worked for them then would not work for them now. Findings revealed most of the students started ASP in
middle school. Besides the activities and services being engaging, useful, and relevant, the students stated that they needed a variety of program offerings.

**Engaged participants.** The students reported being engaged most frequently as a contributor to retention. ASP considered to be “fun” by the students engaged them. Diana referred to ASP to be “like serious fun” and stated, “[I] come back, because it's fun. I mean certain after-school, certain programs like ASP, you just have a blast. I mean you just have to come back.” The students revealed several ways after-school programs engaged youth. A few students described how they were able to tutor students from the middle school through ASP. The students reported feeling “like a leader” with “real” responsibilities. Jacob said opportunities to network with other students was what engaged him. He explained how he has been “networking from early. So I thought it was kind of cool. As now I have friends expanding all over… And it's like training for later.”

**Social Connectedness**

The participants reported the importance of having social connections. They mentioned that staff and peer relationships were vital to their participation.

**Engaged and nurturing staff.** All focus groups reported that the ASP activities not only needed to be engaging but equally important was an engaging and nurturing staff. Most of the students attributed retention to the quality of the staff. The students reported that having staff members who cared about how the students were doing in school and out of school was important to sustaining participation. A passionless staff disengaged youth. Anthony, emphatically stated,
The staff, especially, you have to have passion in what you doing. Because that way you can have students more involved. If the staff does not have much passion, the kids will feel like oh "why am I coming here"…”it's just a waste of time."

A few students compared past negative experiences to current positive experiences with staff members. The students remained in the program because they recognized that working with effective staff “makes all the difference.” At Adams High, Nicole recounted how the former staff members belittled the students. She said,

I was going to say that, in middle school when I was part of the ASP, and it was in sixth grade, tutors kind of treated us like... they spoke to us like we were dumb. I think that, they, to us… [most of the participants agreed with this statement]

Nicole continued,

They (former staff) treated us like...like a community service case. Like we (former staff) have to do this because we want to get community service credit, we don't want to do this we have to. And like here (current staff) they're doing it because they want to, not because they feel that they have to. And like I've seen… I've seen some of the (current staff) with um students and they actually tried to talk to them and understand them well. (Former staff)…it's like they are talking at you and this is how it is. And they don't really, they'll explain it, but it seems like they're talking down to us.

The entire focus group agreed with Nicole. She later added when probed that she wished she had engaged and nurturing former staff members.
Yeah, because when they're talking at you, what they say goes through one ear out the other. You don't really absorb what they're saying. They're talking at you and treating you like a baby. But if they're really talking to you, like an equal and they’re explaining something to you and not trying to treat you like you're simple then it will make things a lot easier.

At Pleasantville, Javier explained that a “talented” staff was significant to student participation. He reported negative experiences with former staff, and stated,

I remember when I was in um the middle school, I was in the after-school homework help, and it’s called, you know, "homework help". And the (former staff) weren't so much of a help. They were so much more of a pain. And um...they....you know, (current staff), she has this smile every day. Walking to her office she smiles at you. When I was in middle school, this (former staff), he had this grouchy, tired, nasty face and I did not like it at all. And you know I just really didn't want their help at all. Knowing that they're gonna come up to me and just look at me (and say) "What you want" "what's your problem" "read it over".

They help you, they didn’t help you... that's what it is.

Some of the students reported that they could go to the staff members with their personal struggles and the staff members were “committed” to them. Erina added “if they're committed I am committed to them.” Javier, when asked why he still comes to the program, added,

I think the faculty… Cause, for example (ASP staff) she's awesome. She, um, she's a good motivator and uh, she knows what she does. And um, I'm glad she was chosen for the…the job too.
The students attributed the role staff had as confidant as a reason they remain in the program. Susanna said as a freshman “It's always good to have someone there, if you have a question or something like that. Like someone that can help you out. Like other students who don't like have like.” George also stated, “It's always like nice to know that there is someone there other than your friends or your parents or your teachers.” He added,

…you can talk about your problems they…(the ASP) it's not a stuffy site. It's not... it's like, you tell your parents or friends, and they don't understand. And you don't feel comfortable with teachers. And you've got to know your (current staff) for a while.

Additionally, Julian said the friendliness ASP staff as a reason why he continues to participate. He stated,

(ASP staff are) like friends...you, like, you don't really...you feel more comfortable with them over a teacher. You probably tell them more. They're kinda at the friend level, you can tell them anything.

Some of the students reported that the staff “went out of their way” to support them. The support ranged from addressing personal issues and being a friend to academic assistance. An engaged and nurturing staff engaged students. Zoe talked about a recent encounter with an ASP staff member.

…because I'm such a procrastinator. I can never... know... I can never know when anything is due, I never know when anything is like... when I have to do something. (Current staff) is always there to just tell me "you're missing a certain amount of community service hours, there's this event coming up, this can help
... with this. Your grade is dropping in this, we can help you with this. Just that kind of stuff, she's always there with all sorts of support.

**Cultural relevance.** Some of the students reported that being part of an organization that served people of color was important to their retention. Wanting to “be around my peeps” was clearly understood throughout the room. After a few minutes into the focus group interview, the students became much more relaxed and shifting from a formal language to a more colloquial conversation. In addition to not being judged, the students stated that the ASP provided a place where they and their culture was embraced. The ASP provided the rare opportunity to have deep conversations about race and culture outside of classroom. The ASP allowed them to connect with youth from other cultures. Crystal, president of the Hispanic Club, recalled one of the activities she did in her ASP. She is Latina and found it interesting to learn about the history of Black Hispanics.

When speaking about the cultural engagement at the ASP, Crystal stated,

> Not only do we talk about obviously Hispanic culture. But um, actually for Black history month we talked about how... as you know we have, like in Colombia Black-Hispanics. So, we also like talk about diversity and racism in our own culture and all these different stuff.

Most of the student indicated positive cultural experiences being part of the ASP. Although Zoe expressed negative comments she received for being part of the ASP which primarily served students of color, she indicated that those comments did not affect her participation. She stated that she received so much benefits that the negativity didn’t bother her. Zoe conveyed,
Ok, well, I heard a lot about this program when I first joined it from other people who were in it. Those who weren't in it...I was like telling my friends like you know I'm in ASP and they will tell me "isn't that for poor Dominican people?"

**Community and civic engagement.** The students attributed participating in community service projects as a reason why they continued attending the ASP. The ASP staff facilitated student participation. George said that the current ASP staff kept “signing me up for a bunch of volunteer service stuff.” The students reported that their participation in one community service project lead them to want to contribute service in other projects offered by the ASP.

There were a number of community service activities that interested the students. All three focus groups mentioned participation in community service activities as part of the ASP. Crystal, a senior at Adams High with some of her friends, went out to register neighbors to vote as part of an ASP activity. Crystal stated she “loves” serving with the ASP and stated, “Me personally, I love midnight run [a project that fed the homeless]. I've been going there for....I think I started in 10th grade.” Rebecca, from Brandeis High, conveyed,

I did the Habitat for Humanity that help me you know do other things for other people that have needs, things like that. I also did music, the music club, we get to travel do competitions see the other side meeting people.

In addition, the students reported that the ASP provided many opportunities that connected them with the community. They stated that they served not because it was a requirement for high school but because it was “fun” and the “right thing to do.” Zoe at
Pleasantville High said, “I mean, it's not like (just academic) kind of stuff, we do do stuff for like community service type things.”

Table 4.2

Factors Contributing to Retention

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<tr>
<th>Concept</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
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<td>Digital technology (i.e. social networking, email, text)</td>
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<td>Rewards</td>
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<tr>
<td>Development of Youth</td>
<td>Awareness of potential</td>
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<tr>
<td>Activities and Services</td>
<td>Engaging</td>
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<td>Social Connectedness</td>
<td>Engaged and nurturing staff</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Building relationships with peers</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Cultural relevance</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Community and civic engagement</td>
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Factors Hindering Recruitment and Retention

When asked, “why do you think some people your age stop coming or never came to this program” and “what things might prevent you from becoming committed to this program”, the students’ responses varied. Some students reported after-school sports programs as a hindrance to participation, while a few others mentioned parents not wanting the students to stay after school as well as family responsibilities the student had during the after-school hours (e.g. babysitting younger siblings). The most frequently reported factors that hindered participation were: (a) lack of brand awareness, (b) lack of awareness of potential, (c) activities not engaging, and (e) negative peer influences.
Marketing

Lack of brand awareness. Most of the students reported that the ASP did not “do a good job” marketing the program. Abdul, from Brandeis High, said that nonparticipants “just don't know about it.” Kyle, a senior at Brandeis High and an ASP member since the seventh grade, stated, “I don't think they have enough information on it. They don't know.” Tyrone also indicated “lack of information” as a hindrance to participation. A few participants suggested the ASP do an outreach marketing campaign early. Kyle suggested, “I think if you hit them up with the tenth grade students, maybe they will start to join up.” Zoe also said, “I feel like they just don't know.”

Development of Youth

Lack of awareness of potential. Many students reported that nonparticipants did not realize their potential and were for the most part “lazy”. George admitted that if he was not enrolled in ASP that “I probably would be extremely lazy.” The students reported that the ASP encouraged career and college planning which nonparticipants are unaware of. Erina stated,

I mean, I really believe that for some people. Maybe they just don't know about it. Or if they do know about it, sometimes they just like put stuff off. They don't think about like the long term. If you like go to after-school program, don't think they can help you with classes...do better. You can do something with that ultimately, you can go somewhere like... great. Like Syracuse or NYU. Like I feel like people don't think about that.

George, in agreement, stated,
…and um, I guess like people don’t think in the long term like (Erina) said. Like personally for me this year went by fast. We only have two months left on so eventually college is going to hit you, and you going to end up being smacked in the face.

Jeremiah, like other students, reported multiple reasons that contributed to students not enrolling or dropping out of the after-school programs. Jeremiah said,

Well, for the most part, I can say laziness. But maybe they are unaware. I don’t think they are that oblivious to it. Everyone should have an idea that there are after-school programs and stuff. So, maybe they, you know, they’re just lazy. But there are also some exceptions where they have things they have to do after school. Or maybe other responsibilities, that take up their time, but other than that. The majority of the people have the opportunity, but they don’t use it.

Some of the students reported that if the nonparticipants knew of the various opportunities provided by the ASP to increase their skills and knowledge, they would join. However, the nonparticipant was aware of the potential they have, and as Aaliyah stated,

‘cause when kids get like to a certain age we like stop wanting... we stop wanting to do things productive. We want to start going to parties "oh I'll do my project tomorrow" and we never get to it because…we go to (a local restaurant) or take a walk somewhere.

**Activities and Services**

**Not engaging.** Some students reported that the ASP needed to provide more opportunities in order to engage more students. Most of the students admitted their ASP
provided a number of engaging programs, however to attract the high school student, more activities were needed. In fact, Jeremiah stated, “activities are the biggest incentive.” When asked to describe their “ideal” program, most of the students reported offering more activities and services than those currently provided by the ASP. When probed, Kimberly, a freshman at Pleasantville, stated, “I would do different workshops” in order to engage more students. Crystal would have the ASP involved in “hiking” and eating “healthy snacks.” In addition, Rebecca conveyed, “I would get professional people, like professional people that are in a career in music, art professions, sport profession to come and talk to the students.” She said that to engage more students, ASPs should “give them more to do.”

**Social Connectedness**

**Negative peer influences.** Some of the students reported that peers hindered after-school program participation. Many of the participants described how high school students, unaware of what the ASP offers, negatively characterized the program. These peers equated going to an after-school program as not being “cool.”

Susanna reported feeling many high school students were more concerned with being “cool” than their education. Most were afraid to do something new and go against the norm. Susanna said ASP participants cared about their future and their education. She stated that the nonparticipants did not care “for their education...they care to see if their friends think they're cool or something like that.” Zoe agreed with Susanna and said,
maybe they are just... are afraid not look "cool", what Susanna was saying, in front of their friends because they're caring about their academic study whatever academic whatever. But, um, maybe they're just scared.”

Table 4.3

*Factors Hindering Recruitment and Retention*

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<tr>
<td>Social Connectedness</td>
<td>Negative peer influences</td>
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**Summary**

The findings indicated that it was not just one factor that lead to recruitment and retention in ASPs but also several factors interacting simultaneously. In sum, youth joined programs because of being marketing to whether from school, family, or peers. The students would less likely to learn about the programs any other way. Other factors that contributed to recruitment were the incentives that the program offered. Trips and opportunities to save money were among the most significant factors related to recruitment. A program that developed skills and provided learning opportunities early in the student’s life was also a factor in recruitment. Lastly, ASPs that provided opportunities for...
youth to build positive relationships with their peers attracted the youth to enroll. In addition, a program that thoughtfully chose a quality staff, which was one that was engaged in the youths’ lives and nurtured the students. This aided in the recruitment of students of color.

This chapter reviewed the results from the focus groups, student writings, and reflective notes, which uncovered various concepts that assisted with recruitment and retention of low-income youth. After-school programs attracted and sustained high school students of color by providing distinct marketing, offering incentives (i.e. college trips), presenting them with opportunities to develop and learn new skills, offering engaging activities and services that are useful and relevant, and by providing opportunities for social connections with peers, other adults, and with the community.

The next chapter will provide implications of the findings, discuss the MIDAS model as a comprehensive framework for recruiting and retaining students of color in high school, discuss the limitations in this study, and provide conclusions and recommendations for educators, stakeholders, policymakers, and students.
Chapter 5: Discussion

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to examine factors that contributed and hindered recruitment and retention of students of color into after-school programs. The results of this study supported many of the findings from the existing literature regarding the appealing and beneficial aspects of after-school programming.

Although only select groups of 28 high school students of color were involved in this study, their comments were important and effective in developing a conceptual framework for future programmatic and policy initiatives. I collected, analyzed, and triangulated the data from the focus group interviews, student writings, and reflective notes with another researcher. I developed the MIDAS model as a comprehensive model for student engagement in after-school programs for high school youth.

This chapter begins with a discussion of the key findings and its relationship to the current body of research. Next, I discuss the implications of the findings as well as the limitations of the study. To conclude this chapter, I offer recommendations for future research and a summary of this research study.

Overview of the Study

This study examined factors related to recruitment and retention of students of color in after-school programs. Although there is a large body of research regarding the impacts of after-school programs, few studies examined recruitment and retention for older youth, and even fewer on students of color. Research showed that after-school
programs do "level the playing field" regarding educational attainment and lead to closing the achievement gap.

Previous research suggested that there are varieties of ways to recruit and retain youth. The most commonly identified factors attributed to recruitment and retention based on the literature were safety, accessibility and location, and learning opportunities. In addition, previous scholarship suggested a number of factors that hindered after-school participation. Some of the barriers found in previous studies included negative perceptions of after-school programs, poorly established communication between programs and parents, boredom, and lack of academic support. Although previous theories and conceptual models were helpful in understanding the problem of recruitment and retention, this research did not seek to test any previous theories.

This study sought to answer three research questions: (a) what factors do students of color in high school identify as contributing to the recruitment in after-school programs, (b) what factors do students of color in high school identify as contributing to the retention in after-school programs, and (c) what factors do students of color in high school identify as barriers to the recruitment and retention in after-school programs. I based the design of this study to obtain deeper understanding from the perspectives of the youth.

The participants were 28 high school students of color, predominately seniors, in a federally funded college-access after-school program. The after-school programs nominated “highly engaged” students. Twenty of the students of color participated in the after-school program for at least three years. Nine of the participants reported over five years in the after-school program. I did not collect family income data, however, the
federally funded programs in this study were mandated to serve low-income populations. The three high schools (Adams, Brandeis, and Pleasantville) were located in the New York City area and have a diverse student population.

Anchored by an interpretivist worldview to research, I conducted a qualitative research design. I collected data from focus groups, student writings, field notes, and reflective writings. I transcribed all of the collected data, which I reviewed for accuracy. Using a thematic analysis method, I developed sub-themes by coding line-by-line then developed broader themes. In addition, when I analyzed data, I noted and properly translated any colloquial terms used to ensure the students’ words and phrases were in context.

The broader themes were named as concepts and emerged from the data. The concepts are marketing, incentives, development of youth, activities and services, and social connectedness (MIDAS). The concepts were defined using the sub-themes and specific students’ accounts were chosen to highlight the salient points. The findings suggest that a combination of both intrinsic and extrinsic motivational factors contribute to recruitment and retention.

**Key Findings**

In this section, I relate the key findings of this study to the existing literature. The findings, based on the three research questions, generate the MIDAS model, which focuses on concepts tied to marketing, incentives, development of youth, activities and services, and social connectedness. The MIDAS model is a conceptual framework for recruitment and retention of students of color and is grounded in a substantial body of previous research. Three research questions guide this study:
1. What factors do students of color in high school identify as contributing to the recruitment in after-school programs?

2. What factors do students of color in high school identify as contributing to the retention in after-school programs?

3. What factors do students of color in high school identify as barriers to the recruitment and retention in after-school programs?

Research and theory suggested that when students are involved in after-school programs they received various positive developmental impacts. In order to receive these benefits, students needed to be recruited and retained. The positive developmental impacts reported in the literature were cognitive, emotional, social, and behavioral. This qualitative research study provides a conceptual framework for recruitment and retention practices of after-school programs, specifically for students of color. Sichivitsa (2007) argued that the interplay between intrinsic and extrinsic motivational factors had a significant effect on student motivation, and my findings suggest that there are five concepts, a combination of both intrinsic and extrinsic motivation, that lead to successful recruitment and retention.

My research findings reveal two extrinsic motivational factors identified as part of the recruitment and retention process. The extrinsic motivational factors are marketing and incentives. In this study, extrinsic motivation refers to motivation derived by external factors such as when a teacher informs the student about the program and encourages the student to enroll. Findings also reveal two intrinsic motivational factors: the development of youth and social connectedness. Intrinsic motivation in this study refers to the potential satisfaction and internal rewards students receive when they
participate in an after-school program. The findings show one factor, activities and services, that have a combination of intrinsic and extrinsic motivation. Before I discuss the findings, I will first introduce the MIDAS model as shown in Figure 5.1.

**MIDAS Model**

The results of this study show that combinations of intrinsic and extrinsic motivational factors are present in the recruitment and retention process. With the MIDAS model differs from the current theoretical youth motivational and engagement models in that it is a practitioner's approach to recruitment and retention. There are five distinctive concepts in this model: (a) marketing, (b) incentives, (c) development of youth, (d) activities and services, and (e) social connectedness. Whereas other models in successfully address why students are motivated to participate, the MIDAS model provides a response to the question of how one recruits and retains students of color.

At the core of the MIDAS model are the students. Every concept has the students in mind. It is important to note that the students drive this model. Consistent and meaningful engagement with high school students regarding marketing tactics, incentives that are attractive, and planning leadership skills sessions for the development of youth are key aspects of the model. The MIDAS model suggests that after-school programs can enhance recruitment and retention efforts if all five concepts are integrated in the program design. The model is based on a thorough review of the literature on youths’ motivation and participation, the research study described in this dissertation, and my personal experiences as an executive director for a nonprofit after-school program. As such, I argue that this model is useful for programs seeking to serve students of color in high school settings.
Figure 5.1. MIDAS model- A comprehensive youth recruitment and retention model.
Recruitment factors. Results of this study indicate nine sub-themes that contribute to recruitment of high school students of color. School recruitment is one of the most frequently mentioned contributing factors. Over 50% of the participants mention being recruited by a school representative (i.e. teacher, principal, administrator, guidance counselor). Recent evidence suggested that teachers play a unique role in the lives of their students and have powerful influences regarding the types of experiences they create for students (Hallinan, 2008).

Students spend most of their waking hours in school, thus giving the school and its members’ enormous authority in directing the future of the students of color. The body of literature to expand in student-teacher relationship research is conducted around the world. In China, the research shows that low-income students’ attachment to school is significantly affected by the students’ perceptions of the teacher (Chong, Huan, Quek, Yeo & Ang, 2010). School recruitment in the literature shows to be an effective strategy, however this result is not supported by Terzian et al., (2009) where participants in the study stated “that they would be less likely, if at all, to listen to a program recommendation made by a teacher or a parent” (p. 4).

Family recruitment plays a significant role in encouraging youth to join after-school programs. All three focus groups report family recruitment as to the reasons why they enrolled in the program. Previous research indicates that family members play a part in recruiting students into after-school programs (Weitzman et al., 2008). In fact, Robinson and Fenwick (2007) revealed that Black parents will enroll their children if the after-school program (a) has learning opportunities, (b) uses time constructively, (c) is
supportive, (d) is socially competent (i.e. interpersonal, cultural, decision making), (e) has high expectations for the youth, and (f) has a positive outlook.

Prior studies noted the importance of family in the enrollment process (i.e. Dawes & Larson, 2011; Robinson & Fenwick, 2007), but did not discuss the role of siblings and cousins. One of the unexpected findings reveals that family recruitment involved younger family members rather than the parents. In fact, only one student reports being introduced to the after-school program by a parent. Two sisters, Catena and Caprice, report being discouraged by their immigrant father who told them “don't stay after school.” Younger family members appear to have influence over program enrollment. For example, in Pleasantville High, 6 out of the 8 participants report enrolling because of outreach by a sibling or cousin. The sibling/cousin outreach might have to do with those recruiters being seen as “peers.”

Therefore, it is no surprise that peer recruitment is reported to influence recruitment into after-school program. Students in this study report that friends have significant influence over their decisions. Peer recruitment is an effective strategy because students act as “accumulators and distributors” of knowledge in ways that others cannot (Santo, Ferguson, & Trippel, 2010). Rather than relying on indirect marketing (i.e. posters, flyers), peer recruitment is a viable and effective recruitment approach (Lauver, 2004). High school students are largely concerned with peer group influences and being “cool” as Susanna states in the interview. Peer recruitment has the capacity to produce “a cascade effect in which one teen recruits another teen who recruits another teen and so on” (Davis, Rubin, Taylor, & Yu, 2007, p. 2). Additionally, Terzian et al., (2009) supported my findings that peer recruitment is an effective enrollment strategy.
Peers generate the most buzz about a program, and were deemed the most reliable source of information. All participants agreed that they were more likely to trust peer reviews of a program than almost anything else. The use of program ambassadors—peers who currently participate in the program—is known to be an effective peer recruiting strategy (p. 4).

The concept of incentives is identified as contributing to both recruitment, such as trips and saving money, and retention, such as rewards. College trips are frequently mentioned throughout all three focus groups; many of the participants report attending trips to several college campuses. Incentives are a way after-school programs can foster engagement (McAllister, 1990). In fact, Collins et al. (2008) supported my findings that incentives encourage participation.

Although incentives are frequently mentioned in the findings, this concept has not escaped criticism from those involved in education reform. For instance, Fryer (2010) examined the impact of financial incentives and student achievement in a randomized trial study. The study analyzed data from 260 public schools (n=38,000) in Chicago, Dallas, New York City, and Washington, D.C. The researcher found no statistical significance in standardized math or reading scores in three of the four cities. There was also a critique in the literature where theory rejected the use of extrinsic motivation and encouraged fostering and promoting intrinsic factors (Ryan & Deci, 2000). However, other research revealed that although incentives may not necessarily generate engagement, it did influence the high school student’s decision to participate in an after-school program (Dawes & Larson, 2011). Opportunities to travel to teen conferences
were effective incentives for students exemplifying strong leadership in the after-school program (Lauver, 2004).

The findings show that development of skills as contributing to recruitment. Development of skills includes leadership skills, social skills, business networking skills, test taking skills, and life skills. This finding is no surprise considering skill building is the basis of positive youth development. One of the major finding of Deschenes’ et al. (2010) was that after-school programs that provided leadership opportunities successfully engaged older youth.

Supporting my findings of development of skills linked to program participation is Ferrari, Lekies, and Arnett’s (2008) study that examined long-term after-school program participation and found youth reported that the skills they learned helped with leadership, problem solving ability, and teamwork. In addition, Perkins’ et al. (2009) examined factors related to participating and not participating in after-school programs and found, “regardless of gender or ethnicity, participants reported acquisition and mastery of life skills as important determents for participation” (p. 431). This kind of learning was critical because the numerous transferable skills it produces (Ferrari & Turner, 2006).

Students in this study desire the opportunity to learn. These learning opportunities further increase the students’ ability to negotiate during the school day (Gardner et al., 2009) and provides the students with the ability to build self-esteem. This is similar to self-determination theory, which requires competence as a factor of engagement (Niemiec, & Ryan, 2009). These learning opportunities are found to enhance “flow,” which is the intrinsic motivational factor found when students are
engaged in activities they enjoy (Shernoff, Csikszentmihalyi, Schneider, & Shernoff, 2003).

Students of color, despite the achievement gap, want to participate in contexts that involve learning. Studies on African American students that correlated lack of achievement to students not wanting to “act white” (Fordham & Ogbu, 1986) was misrepresented according to Tyson et al. (2005). Tyson et al. (2005) found academic achievement of the students of color irrespective of the students’ actions. All 28 students in the study participated in one or more learning opportunity activities offered by the after-school program. This finding is in alignment with previous studies that explored student achievement (Kalish et al., 2010; Lewis et al., 2008; Shernoff et al., 2003; Tyson et al., 2005).

People of color have a long history of academic aspirations. Nasir et al., (2009) argued that despite of the existence of racism in the United States, from a historical context, African American “saw education as the key to social mobility” (p. 77). Lewis et al., (2008) insisted that there must be a reframing of what is defined as success and failure, especially in urban schools, where students of color “face the added challenge of overcoming limited access to critical educational resources and knowledge” (p.131).

*Duration* refers to the effort to recruit early. In this recruitment and retention study, 20 of the 28 students participated for over three years, and 9 students report over 5 years of program participation. Arbreton et al. (2008) found that if a student is recruited in middle school, the student was likely to participate in high school after-school programs. Many of the students in this study were recruited during their middle school years. Duration in the program has beneficial developmental impacts which manifests
what Vandell et al. (2006) calls a “theory of change” where the longer a student is in an after-school program the better the outcomes. There was evidence in the literature that there is a strong correlation between frequent attendance in after-school programs and a variety of positive outcomes such as time spent on homework assignments and higher school attendance (American Youth Policy Forum, 2006).

The final subtheme that factored into recruitment is not unexpected. This factor, *building relationships with peers*, has been studied throughout the extant literature (Afterschool Alliance, 2009a; Lauver, 2004; Santo et al., 2010). The students in the study want to have “a chance to socialize with my peers” as Nicole states in the focus group. Joseph (2010) explored the meaning of after-school program for adolescent boys in a phenomenological study. Joseph’s (2010) study accords with my findings, which showed that because of rarity of meaningful relationship with peers, the boys in the study enjoyed after-school programs because they were able to develop a sense of belonging to the group as well as embrace diversity among their peers.

Building relationships with peers is attractive to high school students of color because it builds sense of belonging (Joseph, 2010); fosters peer bonding (Moody, Childs, & Sepples, 2003); reduces aggression and depression (Moore et al., 2005); and connects students to larger community engagement (Pearce & Larson, 2006). In their study of after-school recruitment and retention, Strobel et al. (2008) found that for students of color building relationships with peers ranged from time to be with friends to peer collaboration. Simply, as Walker and Arbreton (2005) stated, after-school programs are “place to hang out and talk with friends” (p. 12).
According to this present study, peers not only encourage enrollment but hinder enrollment as well. The findings indicates that negative peer influences, for similar reasons as building relationships with peers, have an effect on decisions to join and stay in a program. High school students, wanting to spend their unstructured free time with friends, choose not to participate in after-school programs (Afterschool Alliance, 2009a). Negative peer influences are well documented in the literature as a risk factor such as eating disorders (Meyer & Gast, 2008), and drug use (Hawkins, Catalano, & Miller, 1992).

Fifty years ago, Lazarsfeld and Mertons (1954) theorized that behavioral decisions by adolescents are directly related to negative peer influence. Students in my study did not join after-school programs because they want to remain “cool”. In a controlled study, Pettit et al., (1999) examined unsupervised peer influence during after school hours on externalizing problems. The researchers found a significant relationship between unsupervised peers and at-risk behaviors (Pettit et al., 1999). Dworkin and Larson (2006) found that even within the after-school context students reported negative peer influences. Pettit et al. (1999) supported my findings that peers can negatively impact after-school participation.

**Retention factors.** My findings show that similar to recruitment, retention is a process. After-school programs must understand that recruitment is not enough and must as hard in retaining students of color (Moore et al., 2005). The findings reveal nine factors that contributed to retention, including three that are attributed to recruitment. These include trips, learning opportunities, and building relationships with peers. It is important to note that it is not just one factor that leads to retention. It is a mixture of
these factors that suggest a successful framework for retaining students of color and high school after-school programs.

Considering that all 28 students in the study had cell phones it is of no surprise that digital technology is mentioned as a contributing factor. The students today are growing up in the digital age (Tapscott, 2009). After-school programs should be cognizant of the power of technology in the lives of youth (Hundley & Shyles, 2010). The results of this study did show that engagement digital technology is used in various ways to engage students such as social networking to share information regarding academic learning. Hundley and Shyles (2010) found that high school students interact with their friends and the larger community through digital technology. The researchers argued that the use of digital technology is valuable in the students’ lives because:

- their use of cell phones to connect to one another via texting enables teenagers not only to share ideas and make friends, but to plan and coordinate social time; their use of computers to download entertainment content as well as trade and share personal messages significantly shapes today’s youth culture in broad, essential and significant ways, at times even trumping social contact itself.

In fact, one of the factors mentioned to hinder enrollment, lack of brand awareness, can use digital technology to assist in marketing efforts (Leonard, n.d.; Wong, 2009). After-school programs using online social networking tools, such as Facebook can inform the students about upcoming events and activities (Wong, 2009). Grounded in relationship marketing theory, Leonard (n.d.) provides a marketing strategy for after-school program professional with outlines for distinct marketing practices to successfully market to youth. Repeatedly, the students report nonparticipants “just don’t know” about
the program. This finding is similar to extant literature (Anderson-Butcher, 2005; Terzian et al., 2009). Terzian et al. (2009) asserted that older youth who had a desire to participate in after-school programming did not because they had little knowledge about after-school activities and services.

The results of this study indicate that awareness of potential contributes to retention. Awareness of potential in this study refers the ability to see positive aspects of one's self and one's capacity as well as the ability to project hopes for the future. This awareness of potential has several implications in the literature, one of which is the relationship of high self-worth to an increase in school bonding (Zand & Thomson, 2005). Awareness of potential acknowledges that youth development was fostered in a partnership between person and place supporting positive youth development theory (PYD). According to PYD both the person (high school student of color) and context (after-school program) mattered in obtaining the positive outcomes (Benson et al., 2006).

Prior to joining the program a tenth grade student named Javier reports that “I didn’t see myself trying my best” and was attracted to the after-school program because of the staffer’s ability to foster this awareness of potential. It is no wonder that youth report growth in emotional development as an outcome related to participation (Hansen, Larson, & Dworkin, 2003). Although not statistically significant, Dawes and Larson (2011) found students attending after-school programs obtained “a sense of personal competence from program activities” (p.266). In reference to my finding of awareness of potential, Wood, Larson, and Brown (2009) found in their study that the youth participating in after-school programs learned to see themselves as more responsible.
According to self-determination theory, awareness of potential and knowledge of one’s own competence helped with engagement (Eisenman, 2007). There exists a link between awareness of potential and after-school program participation, as Jeremiah states in the interview. He said, “I got to know what I wanted and what I didn't want.” Students like Nicole understand that people become aware of their potential through participation in the after-school program and when referring to potential states,

I think that they (future ASP participants) will need to know that the process of being learn new things and being able to understand that things doesn't come quickly. It's not something you just understand after one type of, after one meeting. You have to come consistently to understand it better to get an idea of what you need to do after-school programs develop you conveyed.”

Although awareness of potential sustains participation, the findings indicate that the lack of awareness of potential hinders recruitment and retention efforts. A common response to the question “why do you think some people your age stop coming or never came to this program” was “they don’t see the importance” and “laziness.” Herrera and Arbreton (2003) concurred with my findings and stated high school students are at times unmotivated in their pursuits of positive after-school alternatives. However, Lee et al. (2011) presented a caveat and insisted that most times disengagement had to do with lack of supports. Lee et al. (2011) examined high school and college persistence in young men of color and found there other factors instead of “laziness” that discouraged these students in reaching their fullest potential and stated,

Further barriers to college access and enrollment by African American males include being discouraged from attending college by teachers and counselors,
underrepresentation in gifted programs, lack of participation in college-preparatory courses, and underrepresentation in Advanced Placement courses. Asian Americans were found to have high academic achievement in general, yet the model minority myth faced by Asian American males also impeded their access and participation in college (p.66)

Another important finding involves engagement; engaging activities, engaging and nurturing staff, and engaging with the community. Engagement is crucial to programmatic decisions because the findings show that high school youth will not participate in after-school programs they perceive as not engaging (Jones & Perkins, 2006; Kennedy et al., 2007; Lauver et al., 2004; Okeke, 2008). In this study, all of the students were selected because they were “highly engaged.” They not only actively attend their after-school program, but are active in other school and community activities. According to this study, engagement is exceedingly valuable in the after-school context. In regard to engaging activities, Diana said that she continues to participate because it is “fun.” She is not alone in wanting to have fun; in the research “fun” is shown to have a relationship to continued participation (Kauh, 2010; Perkins et al., 2009).

One of most crucial factors attributed to after-school program success or failure was whether or not the students were engaged (McElvain & Caplan, 2001). Kauh (2010) found in her examination of recruitment and retention factors for older African American and Latino males that fun was a factor and reported in 9 out of 10 programs. These programs attracted and retained the young men because the programs were fun. Perkins et al. (2009) stated fun was consistently mentioned as a contributing factor to after-school participation.
After-school programs that made a concerted effort to create engaging programs increased student participation (Deschenes et al., 2010; Kauh, 2010). In order to design an engaging program for high school students, after-school programs took developmental stages into consideration, designing programs that were age-appropriate for older youth (Hammond & Reimer, 2006). A testament of a good program was when the enrolled students said they were having fun (Witt & Caldwell, 2010). Similar to Perkins et al. (2009), my findings show that a majority of the highly engaged participants report to have fun.

When the after-school program was perceived to be not engaging, students tended either not to enroll or drop out (Okeke, 2008). A way to increase engagement, was to involve student voice in planning activities with the staff (Cook-Sather, 2007; Jones & Perkins, 2006; Mitra & Gross, 2009). According to Jones and Perkins (2006) the intergroup contact theory, which posits that group dynamic improved when youth and adult had equal voice, needed to be established in order to improve youth engagement in after-school programs. The researchers found in the study of 108 participants in 12 communities that participants in adult-led collaborations, compared to participants in youth-led collaborations, tended to be less positive about engagement.

In this study, most of the students attribute retention to an engaged and nurturing staff. Research has found that high quality after-school programs employed staff that have the ability to engage youth (Grossman et al., 2002). The findings of this dissertation show the students report staff as a mentor. As Julian states, the staff “kind of light guide you. They guide... if I need help, I will go to them.” Youth attending after-school programs that had engaged adults maximized engagement and intrinsic motivation.
(Shernoff & Vandell, 2007). Previous study found that a dedicated staff improved adolescent development (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2009).

Students worked harder if they perceived the teacher to be engaged and nurturing (Wentzel, 1997). Students in my study state that they are “committed” to the program because the staff is committed to them. Cohen, Garcia, Apfel, and Master (2006) showed in their social-psychological intervention study that students of color who received positive affirmation from an engaged and nurturing teacher significantly did better academically. Their yearlong longitudinal study of 243 African American students, which included a control group, revealed that by the year’s end the achievement gap between African American students and their white peers was reduced by almost 40%.

Howard’s (2001) study of 17 African American students in a large urban northwestern U.S. city also supports my findings, which show a relationship between engaged and nurturing staff and student engagement. Howard (2001) showed the links among positive student-teacher relationships and student engagement. Researchers suggested that an effective strategy for increasing participation in after-school programs among high school students existed when staff was connected and comprehensively informed about what was going on with the youth, both inside and outside of the programs (Deschenes et al., 2010; Strobel et al., 2008).

Engaged and nurturing staff understood how youth perceived the world and instead of being alienated from youth subculture, they embraced it (McInerney, 2009). They also had the ability to “speak their language” (Jones & Deutsch, 2010). Irizarry (2009) found that teachers who embraced the hop-hop culture successfully connected with the youth, regardless of the ethnicity of the teacher. The findings in my study show
that the students were able to relate with the staff members, and Susanna even states “well, I keep coming back because (current ASP staff) is my best friend.” Committed after-school program staff “engages students in learning, fosters mutual respect and caring, and meet the personal learning needs of each student” (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2009). Supporting my findings, Garcia-Reid et al., (2005) in their study on Latino youth engagement found evidence that positive social supports buffered the negative effects the youth might experience in the his or her community and increased engagement.

Community and civic engagement also relates to after-school program retention according to the findings. This was an unanticipated finding. Students report that they remain in the after-school program because of the community service and civic opportunities, and Rebecca states these service opportunities help her do “things for other people that have needs.” Some of the extant literature supported incorporating community and civic engagement opportunity of overall activities offered to youth (Centre for Excellence for Youth Engagement, 2003; Hoffman & Staniforth, 2007; Keilburger & Keilburger, 2002; Post, 2004; Sullivan, 2011). Additionally, high school service-learning has been well established in the literature as producing beneficial positive youth developmental outcomes (Dymond, Renzaglia, & Chun, 2008; Manley, Buffa, Dube, & Reed, 2006; Koliba, Campbell, & Shapiro, 2006). My finding falls within Post’s (2004) description of an emerging theory of youth civic engagement (YCE). Post (2004) argued that “it is evident from this range of activities, as well as from the extent of current foundation support for them, that youth participation in
strengthening democracy has become a critical component of new efforts to renew the civic fabric of our communities for the 21st century” (p.11).

The final finding, cultural relevance shows a slight relationship with retention. Crystal, a fair-skinned Colombian, describes her amazement of learning about “Black-Hispanics” in Colombia and exploring the history of Africans in South America in her after-school program. Doing so made her feel empowered. Ladson-Billings (1995a) concept of cultural relevance explains Crystal’s feeling of empowerment. Ladson-Billings (1995a) argued that part of culturally relevant pedagogy fostered students’ development of a “critical consciousness” as well as maintained or developed a “cultural competence” (p. 160). In fact, Nasir et al., (2009) study revealed that students did not have to abandon their culture in order to achieve academically. My findings show that the students are comfortable in maintaining their cultural identity.

An important note is that two of the three after-school programs in the study are managed by a Caucasian staff member. This is in alignment with Irizarry (2009) who argues that teachers who students of color perceived as “representin’” did not have to be an ethnic minority. In fact, Irizarry (2009) stated of the ten teacher participants nominated to participate in the study, five were White. High school students were aware of cultural and racial discrimination that exist in the schools (Rosenbloom & Way, 2004) and a way to combat that was after-school programs that developed and maintained cultural competence practice. In fact, similar to my finding, Woodland (2008) reviewed factors related to quality after-school programs for students of color and found one factor was the programs ability to “integrate culture into component the environment, which
exhibits to children that their lives and values are appreciated and celebrated within the program” (p. 553).

Implications of Findings

The findings of this study incorporate responses to three research questions, disclose five overarching concepts, and suggests the MIDAS model as a conceptual framework to assist recruitment and retention in after-school programs. These findings have specific implications for theory, practice and policy.

Implications for Theory

The findings of this study have a number of important implications for theory. The first is on student motivation and student engagement research. Although intrinsic motivation is ideal, the findings from this research suggest a balanced approach of intrinsic and extrinsic motivation when working with high school students of color.

Secondly, these findings also suggest expanding cultural relevancy and cultural competency theories in the after-school program research. This study identifies that students of color report engage in the after-school program because they are part of an organization that embraces their culture.

Thirdly, the findings reveal students of color are highly interested in participating in learning opportunities. This finding calls to question the achievement gap and necessitates rethinking it as an opportunity gap. This provides what critical race theorists calls a “counter story” to the achievement gap debate (Love, 2004). For instance, research has revealed that third- and later- generation Mexican- American students academically under-perform their first and second generation counterparts. This disputes the belief, or current story, “that the longer one resides and the quicker one assimilates to
American life, the more successful they will be” (Disla, 2004, p. 21). The counter story uncovers new ways of approaching students of color in education reform.

In addition, more research is needed in the area of youth led decision-making shared with adults (Hart, 1992). A factor that enables success of prosocial behaviors is validation of student concerns and viewpoints by adult stakeholders (Day-Vines & Terriquez, 2008). After-school program research over the past ten years has developed and expanded, however many areas are still in need of exploration. Students’ voice can be critically centered in the dialogue of programmatic improvements (Disla, 2004). Additional comparative research studies are needed to determine if youth-led after-school programs have an impact on recruitment and retention. Expanding on current research around turbulence theory, as described by Mitra and Gross (2009), will deepen the understanding of the implementation of a student voice effort into an after-school program.

Finally, the study introduces the, MIDAS model for understanding and implementing after-school recruitment and retention strategies for students of color. This comprehensive model will require further study to test and enhance the model.

Implications for Practice

**Variety of reasons, a variety of strategies.** After-school programs find it difficult to recruit and retain high school students. The findings indicate that practitioners must carefully examine their approach when designing programs. An after-school program that is rigid regarding time, attendance, or activities will not be as successful as programs that take into account the life of the high school student. The findings show that there are a variety of ways students of color are recruited and retained in these
programs. After-school program practitioners must be cognizant of the need to be more flexible with high school students.

Program practitioners should also be aware of the various ways that students join a program and implement strategies around that variety. For instance, holding a family open house where current participants invite brothers, sisters or cousins might be a good strategy for increasing student enrollment. Based on my findings, the family open house should be held at the middle school before students start transitioning into high school.

**More is better.** Based on the findings, students want a variety of activities. After-school programs offering only one or two programs may fail to engage the students. Although this might be a financial consideration, after-school programs should look into investing in a variety of activities and services to offer the youth. An after-school program can collaborate with other clubs where services are offered in the high school. Doing so can maximize the opportunities after-school programs offer.

It is about the brand. It is clear from the findings that after-school programs should have an active strategic plan, which includes a comprehensive marketing plan. It is important to understand that high school students need to be consistently marketed to while in the program as well as marketed to in order to encourage enrollment. Brand management will help an after-school program in two ways. The first way is the opportunity to create positive brand image and brand awareness. Organizations such as City Year in New York City have successfully implemented this marketing concept by encouraging their volunteer corps members to wear a red jacket uniform when they are serving in the school. In addition to building a positive organizational image, brand management will contribute to greater unity among members of the after-school program.
Marketing is more than just buying T-shirts for the students; it is a well thought out plan of action aimed to achieve specific outcomes.

**Send me a text.** Awareness of the different social media students participate in is critical for the after-school program provider. It is not necessary to be an expert in social media or technology. However, it is critical to understand how the students are currently communicating. Five years ago, students were on MySpace; today they on Facebook. We are unclear as to where they will be tomorrow. Understanding that a student prefers a text rather than an e-mail will assist in after-school programs’ recruitment and retention efforts.

**Finding the right balance.** After-school program practitioners should find a balance between providing academic and nonacademic activities. Many of the students reported the importance of both learning opportunities and nonacademic activities that engage participants. It is difficult for financially stressed programs to find that balance, but doing so is critical in order to not only enroll the students but to keep them coming.

**Implications for Policies**

**Mandate student voice.** After-school programs must make a concerted effort in having youth fully integrated in the decision-making process. The findings from this research were derived from 28 students of color. The students have ideas, suggestions, and leadership potentiality that are sometimes left untapped. After school programs that are in full partnership with the youth are the ones that not only recruit and retain youth but thrive in all after-school program design. Recommendations include having youth serve on the board, be included in creating the program calendar, and in creating youth-led projects within the program planning.
Ensure participation rather than attendance. Incorporate ways of measuring youth engagement beyond the attendance sheet. Investing in youth engagement assessment may assist funding decisions in a financially stressed environment. Doing so may lead to discontinuing funds for programs that are not effectively engaging youth.

Mandate college visits. My findings indicate that college visits are not only what attracts students to the after-school program, but retains them. After school programs that serve high school students should be required to have at least one college visit a year. This offers the opportunity for freshmen to potentially visit four different colleges and universities during their high school career. After-school programs working in partnership with colleges and universities can alleviate some of the financial burdens that an activity such as this may cost.

Mandate school/after-school partnership. After-school programs are viewed as a separate entity rather than a partner in the students’ development and academic growth. Day-teachers and administrators should play an active role in recruitment and retention of students. After-school programs are not designed to be academic institutions. However, as research suggests, they can play a vital role in supporting students throughout their high school careers.

Recruit early. Base on my study, retention is more likely in a program when students participate in the middle school prior to entering high school.

Ensure cultural relevancy. As the findings reveal, programs for underserved youth, who typically are low-income and students of color, must have a culturally sensitive curriculum that ensures acceptance of diversity and a celebration of cultures.
Hiring staff who are cultural conscious will encourage the students to thrive in the demanding high school environment.

**More funding needed.** If programs are mindful of successfully recruiting and retaining urban youth, the increased participation will require for increased funding. Trips, quality staff, tutors, and engagement in relevant and cultural activities require a significant investment that benefits everyone in the future.

**Significance**

This study contributes to various fields of study, including after-school programs, students of color, motivational studies, and recruitment and retention of minorities. Large expectations are placed on after-school programs to help the education community. With the recent reports and studies on students of color, achievement gaps, graduation rates, federal funding decreases, and wealth disparities, this research is timely.

These findings enhance our understanding of recruitment and retention of students of color and offer a framework for the after-school program practitioners.

**Limitations**

A number of caveats need to be noted regarding the present study. A limitation of this study is that of reducing social desirability bias. Social desirability bias refers to the participant in the study having the propensity to present him- or herself in a positive position against social norms (Jo, 2000). This is common phenomenon in self-reporting in focus groups. I addressed this concern by asking direct and indirect questions and asking probing questions to gain clarity. Although social desirability bias may occur, the use of focus group interviews was beneficial because the participants, feeling more
comfortable around their peers, were willing to share their perspectives (DeRoche & Lahman, 2008)

Another limitation is that the numbers of participants in this focus group study was relatively small. Additionally, all of the participants were identified as being “highly engaged” by the after-school programs. Highly engaged youth spent time with the after-school program, shared information with others about the program, initiated program activities, brought other peers to program activities, and advocated on behalf of the after-school program (Jong, 2011). The scope of this study was designed to examine factors that contributed to recruitment and retention. Thus, students who are highly engaged (enrolled and sustained participation) are the ideal informants. With a slightly different set of research questions, it might be interesting to interview nonparticipants in a possible future study.

Because of the sample size and the participant profile, there are limitations on the generalizability of the findings. Therefore, my findings may not be transferred to all other types of after-school programs. Despite these limitations, the findings provide a conceptual framework about how students of color are recruited and retained in after-school programs, which will serve as a base for future studies.

Recommendations for Further Research

I recommend, based on this study, that further examination of recruitment and retention factors for high school students of color be implemented in five areas. In the first area, the future research could involve individual interviews to provide a deeper narrative into the recruitment and retention process. This study was an appropriate
design to garner youth perspectives; however, narratives from individual students may enhance the conceptual model presented.

My second recommendation is that in order to further the understanding of youth recruitment and retentions in after-school programs, the body of research could benefit from interviewing students who either dropped out of a program or decided to never join an after-school program. This may be a unique opportunity to see if there are other barriers to recruitment and retention yet to be uncovered.

It would be interesting to examine the factors with a larger sample of students of color. Therefore, the third recommendation is to broaden the qualitative study, both in quantity and locality. Increasing the number of focus group interviews across various locations throughout the United States will provide for an even richer study. In addition, a further examination of the cultural and contextual factors that influence recruitment and retention is needed across a broader pool of students of color.

Additional research is needed on characteristics of the engaging and nurturing staff serving students of color. The staff is an integral and indispensable part of the after-school experience in my study. What is it that makes them engaging and nurturing? Hence, the fourth recommendation is to conduct research examining the lives of effective staff serving this particular population of high school students.

The final recommendation is to enlist high school ethnographers to expand the knowledge. Future research should concentrate on empowering the student voice. I recommend replicating this study with trained youth ethnographers to conduct focus groups. According to Craig (2009), this participatory action research would encourage “the researcher to consider the interconnectedness of the environment and everyone in it,
the conditions present in the environment, and the interactions among the individuals in
the environment (p. 3). This method of research would allow for students to understand
and help find solutions to the problem of high school recruitment and retention.

Epilogue

Our voices heard. This research begins with three simple questions regarding
high school students of color in after-school programs: why do they come, why do they
stay, and why don't they come. As simple as these questions are, there is not a simple
answer. The months it took to develop a sound research design, and the months it took to
collect and analyze the data shows that this is a complex and intricate problem.

As I buried myself in the words and the sounds of the youth, I began to see the
living and active words of Jesus in Matthew 18:3 which reads, ""I tell you the truth,
unless you change and become like little children, you will never enter the kingdom of
heaven." Although far away from my high school days, I began to see the world as they
do. My husband even dug out my high school yearbook, and as I flip through those
pages of memories, I realize how much the high school experience impacts the rest of
your life.

The notion of finding out the insights and perceptions of students of color was
empowering. This study gives voice to the voiceless. I do not see students of color as
people needing charity; they need inspiration to develop as future leaders in a global
society. For months, I blocked out the noise and read aloud the text to overwhelm this
“instrument” used in the analysis. It is refreshing to learn from those most affected by
the program.
I feel blessed that I had the opportunity to elevate the voices of high school students of color. Their stories are full of passion, laughter, and sometimes sadness. The serious pursuit of their studies leaves a smile in my heart. The descriptions of the recruitment and retention process, which they provide for this research is invaluable. Although I did the analysis, the MIDAS model came from their souls. I am eternally grateful. I remember when I first entitled this research “Our Voice Heard” and feeling the title just did not fit the study. However, after months of deliberating over the research and finally (re)presenting the findings, I realize how appropriate the title is. Our voices heard; indeed, their voices and mine.

The students of color are knowledgeable and specific as to what attracts and retains youth. The students’ voice should be at the head of school reform. I daresay that the voices of the youth will change the world!(P.N. Njapa-Minyard, researcher reflective notes, June 2011).
References


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Koro-Ljungberg, M. (2010). Validity, responsibility, and aporia. *Qualitative Inquiry, 16*(8), 603-610


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Appendix A

Letter of Introduction to the Participants

Dear Student:

Hello! I am a doctoral student in the Ed.D. Program in Executive Leadership at St. John Fisher College. I am conducting a study that will examine the perceptions of high school students about their participation in after-school programs. My research involves asking you to participate in a group of about 10 students. I will ask what attracted members of the group to their after school program and what keeps them coming back to the program. Your name will not be used in reports of the opinions and views of the group. Individual participants will only be identified by a pseudonym. Any comments or other information you provide will thus be kept confidential.

You are being asked to participate in this study because you were enrolled in an after-school program and you are an active participant in the program. As a participant, you will be asked to spend approximately two hours one afternoon during your after-school program session to answer a series of questions about your after-school experiences this year in a small group of 8 to 10 students.

Your participation in this study is voluntary. You are free to decline this offer or to withdraw at any time, for whatever reason. Should you decline or withdraw, there will
be no risk or consequence associated with your decision. In the event that you choose to withdraw during the course of the study, any information you had already provided will remain completely confidential.

Thank you very much for your consideration in becoming a participant in this study. Your contributions will be very helpful to those interested in improving participation in after-school programs for students in high school. The information that participants provide for this study will result in findings and recommendations that will be shared with the participants, educators, and school leaders, and policymakers.

Sincerely,

Pamela N. Njapa-Minyard
Doctoral Candidate
St. John Fisher College
Appendix B

St. John Fisher College

PARENT PERMISSION FORM (For use with minors)

Title of study: Our Voices Heard: Factors Contributing to the Recruitment and Retention of High School Students of Color in After-school Programs

Name of researcher: Pamela N. Njapa-Minyard

Faculty Supervisor: Dr. Jerry Willis  Phone for further information: 914-674-3023

Purpose of study: The purpose of this study is to gain insights associated with enrollment and retention in after-school programs. The research intends to contribute a growing body of research regarding factors that attract and sustain youth to after-school programs, generate new approaches and strategies in after-school programs, and encourage youth inclusion in shaping programs as an effective model for after-school program reform.

Approval of study: This study has been reviewed and approved by the St. John Fisher College Institutional Review Board (IRB).

Place of study: After-school program site

Length of participation: December 2010 – May 2011
Potential Risks: There are no expected risks to participating in this study. Participant confidentiality and anonymity will be maintained at all times. All information provided by participants will be maintained in a secure location.

Potential Benefits: The results of this study will provide scholars, educators, and after-school practitioners with a better understanding of what appeals to students about attending after-school programs for older youth. The study findings will contribute to existing knowledge on factors contributing to enrollment and retention of youth in after-school programs.

Method of protecting confidentiality/privacy: Participants’ names will be concealed and replaced with a pseudonym to protect privacy and confidentiality. All raw data will be stored and locked in the researcher’s office. No personal identifying information will be used in the dissertation, transcript, field notes, or in any subsequent publication.

Your rights: As a parent/guardian of a research participant, you have a right to:

1. Have the purpose of the study, and the expected risks and benefits fully explained to you before you choose to participate.

2. Withdraw your child’s participation at any time without penalty.

3. Refuse to answer a particular question without penalty.

4. Be informed of the results of this study.

I have read the above, received a copy of this form, and I agree to participate in the above-named study.

______________________________________________________________________________
Print name (Participant)     Signature     Date
Consent for a minor child:

I, the parent or guardian of ______________________________, a minor, _______ years of age, consent to his/her participation in the above named study. I have received a copy of this form.

If you have any further questions regarding this study, please contact the researcher listed above. If you experience emotional or physical discomfort due to participation in this study, please contact the Office of Academic Affairs at 585-385-8034 or the Wellness Center at 585-385-8280 for appropriate approvals.
ASSENT FORM (For use with minors)

**Title of study:** Our Voices Heard: Factors Contributing to the Recruitment and Retention of High School Students of Color in After-school Programs

**Name of researcher:** Pamela N. Njapa-Minyard

**Faculty Supervisor:** Dr. Jerry Willis  Phone for further information: 914-674-3023

**Purpose of study:** The purpose of this study is to gain insights associated with enrollment and retention in after-school programs. The research intends to contribute a growing body of research regarding factors that attract and sustain youth to after-school programs, generate new approaches and strategies in after-school programs, and encourage youth inclusion in shaping programs as an effective model for after-school program reform.

**Approval of study:** This study has been reviewed and approved by the St. John Fisher College Institutional Review Board (IRB).

**Place of study:** After-school program site

**Length of participation:** December 2010 – May 2011
Potential Risks: There are no expected risks to participating in this study. Participant confidentiality and anonymity will be maintained at all times. All information provided by participants will be maintained in a secure location.

Potential Benefits: The results of this study will provide scholars and educators with better understandings for increasing participation in after-school programs for older youth. The study findings will contribute to existing knowledge on factors contributing to enrollment and retention of low-income youth in after-school programs.

Method of protecting confidentiality/privacy: Participants’ given names will be concealed and replaced with a pseudonym to protect privacy and confidentiality. All raw data will be stored and locked in the researcher’s office. No personal identifying information will be used in the dissertation, transcript, field notes, or in any subsequent publication.

Your rights: As a research participant, you have a right to:

1. Have the purpose of the study, and the expected risks and benefits fully explained to you before you choose to participate.

2. Withdraw from participation at any time without penalty.

3. Refuse to answer a particular question without penalty.

4. Be informed of appropriate alternative procedures or courses of treatment, if any, that might be advantageous to you.

5. Be informed of the results of this study.

I have read the above, received a copy of this form, and I agree to participate in the above-named study. I understand that the results of this study may be presented at conferences and published in journals and give my permission for use of any data
collected from my participation to be included in such presentations and publications. I understand that my anonymity and confidentiality will be protected.

_________________________________  _______________________________  ____________
Print name (Participant)   Signature     Date

_________________________________  _______________________________  ____________
Print name (Investigator)  Signature     Date

If you have any further questions regarding this study, please contact the researcher listed above. If you experience emotional or physical discomfort due to participation in this study, please contact the Office of Academic Affairs at 585-385-8034 or the Wellness Center at 585-385-8280 or appropriate approvals.
Appendix D

Interview Protocol: Student Focus Group Interview Questions

Date: ________________________________________________________

Location Site: _________________________________________________

Open-Ended Questions for Student Participants

1. You have a friend who is thinking about joining this program.
   a. How would you describe the program?
   b. What would they need to know before they come to the program?

2. Why did you start coming to this program?

3. Why do you keep coming back?

4. Do you plan on attending this program in the future? Why? Why not?

5. Why do you think some people your age stop coming or never came to this program?

6. To you, what is the most important part of this program?

7. How committed are you to this program? Why? Why not?

8. What things might prevent you from becoming committed to this program?

9. You are given some money to design an after-school program for students in your school. The program would help them become better people. You don’t have to use anything that program does, but you can if you want to.
   a. Where would your program be?
   b. What kinds of activities would your program include?
   c. What would you spend your money on?
   d. What would be the most important activities in your program?

(Thank everyone for participating in this focus group interview. Assure the group of confidentiality of responses and potential future interviews.)

Appendix E

Research Article Information Sheet

Topic: _________________________________________________________________

Author: ________________________________________________________________

Year: __________________________________________________________________

Title: __________________________________________________________________

Abstract: __________________________________________________________________

My Quick Overview:
_______________________________________________________________________
_______________________________________________________________________
_______________________________________________________________________
_______________________________________________________________________
_______________________________________________________________________
_______________________________________________________________________

APA Citation: ___________________________________________________________

Type of study: ___________________________________________________________

Research Problem:
_______________________________________________________________________
_______________________________________________________________________
_______________________________________________________________________

Research Context: __________________________________________________________________
Participants:

______________________________________________________________________

Sample Size:________________________________________________________________

Data Collection:__________________________________________________________

Data Analysis:___________________________________________________________

Findings:

_______________________________________________________________________

_______________________________________________________________________

_______________________________________________________________________

_______________________________________________________________________

Relation to my research question:

_______________________________________________________________________

_______________________________________________________________________

Supports/Opposes other research:

_______________________________________________________________________

_______________________________________________________________________

_______________________________________________________________________
Appendix F

Focus Group Checklist

Make arrangements for
❑ Private setting for focus group site
❑ Transportation to focus group site
❑ Refreshments for participants (if applicable)

What to take to the focus group

Equipment
❑ 1 digital tape recorder (plus 1 extra, if available)
❑ 1 digital video camera (plus 1 extra, if available)
❑ Spare batteries and memory cards
❑ Reflective notebook and pens
❑ Name card materials

Focus group packet
❑ 1 large, heavy-duty envelope
❑ Archival information sheet with archival number
❑ Copy of focus group interview protocol for facilitator
❑ Signed consent and assent forms (from all participants)
❑ Note-taking form
❑ Debriefing form

What to place in the envelope after the focus group
❑ Completed archival information sheet
❑ Signed inform consent form (signed by facilitator)
❑ Labeled focus group guide with notes (facilitator’s copy)
❑ Researcher reflective notes
❑ Labeled and transferred audio and video tapes onto laptop