VOICES UNHEARD: HOW AFRICAN AMERICAN MALES
AT A JUVENILE JUSTICE SCHOOL NARRATE THEIR EXPERIENCE

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Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to my incredibly supportive and amazing wife and our three beautiful daughters, Abigail, Charlotte, and Violet.
ACKNOWLEDGMENT

Earning a doctorate degree is not done in isolation. I want to recognize my grandmother’s, whose strength created a foundation of resiliency for this work. My hometown, Oswego, NY and all those that have supported my development from youth to young adulthood, and I would be remiss to not acknowledge my family, each of my sisters, aunts, uncles, and cousins who have served as guides throughout my career. Thank you to my parents and sisters, who have in their own special ways dedicated their lives to service and improving their community, and providing me with a roadmap to enhancing the lives of others.

Special thanks and recognition to my dissertation committee, Dr. Caroline Watts, Dr. Howard Stevenson, and especially to my chairperson, Dr. Michael Nakkula. His vision for this work, as well as his professional and personal guidance has been invaluable.

This work is an acknowledgement to each of the students and families that have graced my life all these years and is an expression of my sincerest gratitude in allowing for me to be associated with such amazing people.
ABSTRACT

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Juvenile Justice schools are established with the best of intentions. Whether they assist with graduation completion, provide vocational skills, or serve as an opportunity for students to return to their traditional high school, these schools provide students with opportunities to access educational opportunities during their confinement. However, what is lacking in these schools is the voice of these students in their design and evaluation. The incorporation of their voice could enhance their experience while detained and opportunities once their placement has concluded.

This qualitative phenomenological study shares the unique experiences of a group of African American male students that attended the Jones Juvenile Detention Center, a secure pre and post disposition facility serving adolescents in the mid-Atlantic region. It asks, how do African American male high schoolers narrate their experience of attending a juvenile justice education program? 2. What perceptions do these students have regarding the academic and social supports provided during their placement? 3. How can this information be used to assist in the future design of disciplinary based alternative programs locally, as well as nationally? The intent of this research study is to enhance
the instructional and social opportunities for the students in attendance, provide a forum for this population of students to share their academic journey, and provide the educational field with insights from one program as academic leaders design alternative education programs based on disciplinary action for students.
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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

“In these days, it is doubtful that any child may reasonably be expected to succeed in life if he is denied the opportunities of an education. Such an opportunity, where the state has undertaken to provide it, is a right that must be made available on equal terms.” Chief Justice Earl Warren, Brown v. Board of Education (1954)

The United States Department of Education describes an alternative school as “a public elementary or secondary school that 1). Addresses needs of students that typically cannot be met in a regular school; 2). Provides nontraditional education; 3). Serves as an adjunct to a regular school; or 4). Falls outside the categories of regular, special education, or vocational education” (NCES, 2010). The students in attendance are typically at risk of academic failure (Zweig, 2003). This can be due to poor attendance, historically limited success, interrupted schooling, and a host of other factors, including lowered academic and social expectations, more significant consequences for disciplinary actions than their peers, and higher rates of exclusionary practices. Many of these programs, essentially designed as a place to support those students some felt unable to cope in the traditional setting, have been in existence in some form or another for the past century (Brush & Jones, 2002). During the 2000-01 school year, 39% of public school districts nationally, administered at least one alternative program for at-risk youth and districts with high minority enrollments and high poverty concentrations were more likely to have such programs, according to the Fast Response Survey System District Survey of Alternative Schools (Kleiner, Porch, & Farris, 2002). Across the United States in public K-12 schools, alternative education programs have been established to provide students with options that may not be offered in the traditional education setting. These options range from the need for additional disciplinary support to more intensive
instructional needs, and even smaller class sizes to assist in off-task behavior. Unfortunately, the enrollment in these programs does not proportionally represent who attends K-12 schools across the nation. According to the Schott Report (2012) in Virginia, where this study was conducted, African American males accounted for approximately one third of all students in alternative education programs, compared to 12 and 13 percent for their White and Hispanic peers. This is significant, as the racial demographics of the location for this study is one that is predominantly students of color, and in particular, more than 30% African American. It is also significant as it begs the question, why? What is the reason for this overrepresentation, not only in Virginia, but nationally? Is it as simple as the reasons listed previously, or is it the symptom of a larger systemic approach to education of students of color in the United States?

According to Darensbourg, Perez & Black, (2010), African American males are at an increased risk of experiencing disciplinary practices that exclude them from the traditional school environment, making them more susceptible to participation in an alternative education program. Research shows that African American students, and especially African American boys, are disciplined more often and receive more out-of-school suspensions and expulsions than White students. Perhaps more alarming is the 2010 finding that over 70% of the students involved in school-related arrests or referred to law enforcement were Hispanic or Black (Education Week, 2013). A 2009-2010 survey of 72,000 schools (kindergarten through high school) shows that while Black students made up only 18 percent of those enrolled in the schools sampled, they accounted for 35 percent of those suspended once, 46 percent of those suspended more
than once and 39 percent of all expulsions. Overall, black students were three and a half times more likely to be suspended or expelled than their White peers (Lewin, 2012). The Coalition of Schools Educating Boys of Color (2015) cites that 46% of these students are given out of school suspension multiple times, and that 35% are arrested while in school. Racial disparities in school suspensions and school and community arrests are reiterated throughout the juvenile justice system. For example, in 2004 African American youth were:

16% of the youth population in the United States

28% of youth arrested

37% of youth detained following arrest

35% of youth petitioned into family [juvenile] court

32% of youth adjudicated [convicted] of a delinquent act [crime]

36% of youth placed [incarcerated] in a juvenile residential institution

42% of youth transferred to the adult criminal justice system

58% of youth placed in an adult prison (Weismman, et al. 2008).

However, the experience of students in alternative programs, specifically those that serve students in juvenile justice or detention centers, has been under examined. As such, the focus of my research is to understand how African American males narrate their experience of attending a juvenile justice alternative education program. The goal is to use the information from the participant interviews to improve the Jones Juvenile
*Detention Center* (JJDC) juvenile justice education program so that it meets the needs of the present students and for those who will participate in the future. By incorporating the voice of the students, it will allow for those leading this institution to have a more complete picture of the challenges and successes of this program, and also what aspects its academic and social programs may be in need of modification to move the program forward.

Additionally, this study could lead to a change of the perceptions of how the education community of *Jonesville*, as well as the community at large, perceives the JJDC. Although insufficient data exists regarding the communities perception of this program, anecdotal reports describe it from both a community perspective and within the school district it serves, as one where the grades of students stabilize, but the reason for placement becomes the identifying label for the student moving forward within the school division. This perception may have a far-reaching impact, especially in the funding to support the program, and the quality of staff that work for the program, in addition to the perceptions that the students may have of it. On a national scale, this study could provide guidance in the design of alternative programs, but especially those that are focused on disciplinary reasons and of juvenile justice based programming. The insight into the experience of African American males who are in these programs will shine a light onto how best to assist in their academic and social development, but perhaps more importantly, give a voice to one population of our high school students whose voice is absent in current literature regarding school design.
Research Questions

In an effort to understand and provide a voice to the experience of a cohort of African American males in a juvenile justice school, there are three research questions which drive my investigation. They are the following:

1. How do African American male high schoolers narrate their experience of attending a juvenile justice education program?

2. What perceptions do these students have regarding the academic and social supports provided during their placement?

3. How can this information be used to assist in the future design of disciplinary based alternative programs locally, as well as nationally?

This work is divided into five chapters. Chapter One discussed the types of alternative schools utilized across the United States, as well as reasons for the disproportionate number of students of color, particularly African American males in the juvenile justice system. Chapter Two will provide the reader with the conceptual framework, as well as context for the research, to include the site, my context in the site, and a day in the life of a typical student in the site. Chapter Three presents the methods and findings of my qualitative data and Chapter Four includes a summary of my findings and suggestions related to the design of these programs for peers in the field. Chapter Five will outline action steps for educational leaders working with alternative program populations. In an effort to understand and provide a voice to the experience of a cohort of African American males in a juvenile justice school, there are three research questions which drive my investigation. They are the following:
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CHAPTER 2: CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK AND RESEARCH CONTEXT

My conceptual framework is based on the abundance of data regarding the numbers of African American males and their academic and social struggles in K-12 public schools. Whether the research uses current economic data, high school graduation rates, or the number of disciplinary infractions as a reference point, the struggles of African American males in schools are well documented. What is not however, is the experience of African American male students who have been placed in an alternative program for disciplinary reasons. Some would argue that it is perhaps due to the limited information regarding the plight of these students in general, as some move from program to program or school to school. Or that the reason is due to the overall challenge in determining the success of alternative schools. Perhaps it is as Terry Cash, the Assistant Director of the National Dropout Prevention Center at Clemson University shared in an interview from 2012. He stated that the perception of alternative schools changed in 1999, following the Columbine incident “...schools and districts and superintendents who were saying, we’ve got to be able to identify these kids who are at risk and put them in an environment that will protect our other kids who want to learn and aren’t disruptive”(Lieszkovsky, 2012).

In a 2008 Citizens League StudentsSpeakOut.org Web site (Minnesota), students who could have attended an alternative school or program reported that they chose not to because they thought of them as school for “bad” or “stupid” kids (Citizens League, 2008). Although this sentiment was shared by students, combined with the feelings of some administrators, as Cash stated, this could be a reason for the lack of recent literature on the topic. I would argue, however, that the reason there is not a dearth of literature on
the topic is for reasons far more nefarious. By not providing a voice to students in alternative programs, and specifically those in juvenile justice programs, it allows some to deny their existence. This is not a new concept, especially when dealing with those that have been historically marginalized. Whether it be the marginalization of the rights and voices of those in LGBTQ community, or the discourse tied to the Black Lives Matter movement, or the continued fight for equality for women in this nation and abroad, the silencing of the voices of these groups and others allows the general society to pretend as if the matter is insignificant or non-existent.

It is also important to note two specific areas of scholarship that support my assertion of the marginalization of African American males in K-12 education. Critical Race Theory (CRT) has at its core five basic tenants and constraints pertinent to this work. Payne Hiraldo in an essay titled, The Role of Critical Race Theory in Higher Education (2010), states that CRT’s framework is comprised of the following five tenets:

1. Counter-storytelling. Counter-storytelling is a framework that legitimizes the racial and subordinate experiences of marginalized groups (DeCuir & Dixson; Ladson-Billings; Parker & Villalpando, 2007). DeCuir and Dixson stated that counter-stories are a resource that both expose and critique the dominant (male, White, heterosexual) ideology, which perpetuates racial stereotypes. Counter-stories are personal, composite stories or narratives of people of color (Delgado Bernal & Villalpando, 2002). Voice/Counterstory: the voices of people of color must be shared to analyze institutions and seen as valid forms of evidence of discrimination and bias.
2. The permanence of racism. The permanence of racism suggests that racism controls the political, social, and economic realms of U.S. society. In CRT, racism is seen as an inherent part of American civilization, privileging White individuals over people of color in most areas of life, including education (DeCuir & Dixson, 2004; Delgado, 1995; Ladson-Billings, 1998; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995).

3. Whiteness as property. The third tenet of CRT is Whiteness as property. Due to the embedded racism in American society, Whiteness can be considered a property interest (DeCuir & Dixson, 2004). As a result, this notion operates on different levels. These include the right of possession, the right to use and enjoyment, the right to disposition, and the right of exclusion (DeCuir & Dixson; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995; Ladson-Billings, 1998). Property implies ownership and that allows for exclusion, particularly those deemed undesirable or “less than.”

4. Interest conversion. This tenet acknowledges White individuals as being the primary beneficiaries of civil rights legislation (Ladson-Billings, 1998; DeCuir & Dixson, 2004; McCoy, 2006). DeCuir and Dixson argued, “early civil rights legislation provided only basic rights to African Americans, rights that had been enjoyed by White individuals for centuries. These civil rights gains were in effect superficial ‘opportunities’ because they were basic tenets of U.S. democracy” (p. 28). Additionally, whites in policy making positions take the interests of people of color and make change, but these policies are often annulled if whites begin to feel threatened.

5. Critique of liberalism. This stems from the ideas of colorblindness, the neutrality of the law, and equal opportunity for all (DeCuir & Dixson, 2004).
Colorblindness is a mechanism that allows people to ignore racist policies that perpetuate social inequity (DeCuir & Dixson, 1999). It challenges the pace of the liberal approach to progress and questions colorblind ideology (DeCuir & Dixson, 2004; Ladson-Billings, 1998; McCoy, 2006).

In education, and particularly for this study, it should be noted that the participants could easily be looked at as property (whiteness as property construct). As these students are deemed to be “inconvenient” in terms of the conventional K-12 educational system in this country, they are excluded from the conversation, policy development, and strategies to improve education. It should also be noted that the data shared in the previous chapter, in many instances, have existed for multiple decades. The lack of action directed to assist students in alternative education programs, particularly juvenile justice settings, or to note the lack of expediency, is supported by the construct of interest convergence as well.

My aim in interviewing a cohort of students to gain insights to their educational experience at a juvenile justice school is to provide a voice of the genuine thoughts and actions of the students encased in the legal system. Provided in subsequent chapters will be qualitative data regarding course credit accumulation, grade point averages, and attendance rates of the participants in this study. What these numbers don't tell is the individuality within this collective group, but will inform the reader of each participant’s perspective on the impact of race in their individual experience.

The final aspect of critical race theory incorporated into this piece is the restrictive vs. expansive construct. One goal of this work is to redirect the work at the site of the study,
and in doing so, prevent practices at the juvenile justice center that perpetuate racism and discrimination, especially noting that the majority of students in attendance are of color. As an example, historically, when students transition from this facility to a traditional school or program, one would think that a transition plan, incorporating the work that has been accomplished to assist the student during their incarceration and any and all counseling type services, would be developed to provide the student, school, and family, with clear direction upon reentry. Unfortunately, this does not occur consistently, and especially with those in this study. Perhaps, if this practice was instituted, the student would see a higher level of success, academically and socially, at their new school. Perhaps, the school receiving the child would have a modified view of the student, and maybe the family would perceive the value of their child to be greater than previously felt. Perhaps, this would be the case, but due to the racist and oppressive nature of the juvenile justice system, this inconsistent practice at this site is allowed to exist, and in some cases, flourish.

The school to prison pipeline, often tied to disciplinary practices in K-12 schools and mass incarceration of youth, is a topic incorporated into this work as well. In a February, 2015 article titled, The School to Prison Pipeline, Explained, by authors Nelson and Lind, they shared that “Juvenile crime rates are plummeting, and the number of Americans in juvenile detention has dropped. One report shows the juvenile incarceration rate dropped 41 percent between 1995 and 2010” (pg.1). Unfortunately, out of school suspensions have increased more than ten percent, and doubled since 1970 (Nelson, Lind, 2015). The rate of African American students being suspended is greater than that of any other group
in schools and these suspensions are often tied to more discretionary type matters, such as insubordination and defiance. At the district level for the site of this study, one of the greatest reason for suspensions from school is accumulated offensives. This specific reason, as well as insubordination and defiance, leave the interpretation of the students actions solely in the hands of a site administrator or school resource officer that gets to set the number of allowable offenses. It should also be noted that schools that have more African Americans attending, have higher rates of suspension than those with smaller populations of black students. In a 2014 study by Payne and Welch, it was noted that the theory of racial threat and how K-12 institutions implement controls with students tend to be more punitive. The pictograph titled, “Are Our Children Being Pushed into Prison?”, presents data that supports the more severe punishments that African American and Latinos receive in schools, as well as the greater number of students of color being in the foster care system, and the impacts of this placement.
Jonesville City Public Schools*, a school district in the metro Washington DC area, has a subset of students that each year participate in alternative education programs. These programs usually have the best of intentions in mind: to provide students with access to the same rigorous curriculum at a site designed to support their academic and emotional needs, or to offer the student a safe place to continue their academic journey.
Others are designed with a more vocational learning emphasis, while some are designated for students with specific special education learning needs. Regardless of the purpose of the program, the overall goals stated by most of these institutions is to reconnect the student to the mainstream traditional educational system or to remove the student from the mainstream setting as a strategy to provide security for his or her peers. The students that often attend alternative programs are deemed by many to be “at risk” and those that will struggle to maintain or develop typical adult roles and responsibilities, such as maintaining consistent employment and housing, and the ability to pursue higher education (Zweig, 2003).

The purpose of this framework is to provide the reader with the theories, beliefs, and aspects of juvenile justice schools that have established the foundation for this research. It will offer four bodies of scholarship that have informed my conceptual framing of African American males’ lived experience in attending a juvenile justice education program. These strands are a) Alternative school design, b) Disproportionate Minority Contact, c) Black males experience in high school, and d). Culturally responsive pedagogy. Alternative education opportunities have been available to students for centuries, but have only recently been analyzed due to the overemphasis on issues like the dropout rate and the achievement gap. Disproportionate minority contact will be defined, reasons for this, and actions to address this systemic injustice will be shared. The experience of African American males in high school, including four challenges not often recognized by their peers, their teachers, and the community will be presented. Lastly, culturally responsive pedagogy will serve as the guide as an instructional philosophy to
be utilized to build on the tremendous academic and social attributes of incarcerated youth.
Alternative School Design

Mary Anne Raywid, (1994) developed a three type typology to define the characteristics of alternative schools:

Table 2. Alternative School Types

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TYPE OF SCHOOL</th>
<th>STUDENT PROFILE</th>
<th>REASON FOR PARTICIPATION</th>
<th>MODELS</th>
<th>CHARACTERISTICS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>TYPE I</td>
<td>Open enrollment. This type of school is designed to serve all students, ranging from those looking for an innovative or challenging curriculum, or those that are trying to avoid dropping out of school.</td>
<td>Students choose to attend usually as an alternative to the traditional model of schooling.</td>
<td>*Magnet schools *Charter schools *Experiential schools *Career focused and Job Based schools *Dropout recovery programs *After hours schools</td>
<td>Divergence from standard school organization and practices (deregulation, flexibility, autonomy, and teacher and student empowerment) *Small classes *Small staffs *Personalized approach</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TYPE II</td>
<td>Student participation is usually is for a predetermined time based on a disciplinary infraction.</td>
<td>*Students must attend this program due to a violation(s) of school rules. *Students participate until a requirement is met.</td>
<td>*In school suspension *Last chance schools</td>
<td>*Curriculum is limited to a few basic, required courses, or; *Classes are provided by the base or home school as a list of assignments.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TYPE III</td>
<td>Participation is based on social or emotional challenges causing either academic or behavioral barriers to learning, and often by choice.</td>
<td>Those that attend are provided counseling, access to social services, and academic remediation.</td>
<td>*Therapeutic learning centers</td>
<td>*Small, therapeutic settings focused on addressing social or behavioral concerns.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
These three types of alternative schools tend to be those found throughout the country, sometimes in isolation, but often with many schools having a combination of multiple types. The Jonesville Juvenile Detention Center, provides a Type II model, but also incorporates aspect of the therapeutic counseling shared in a Type III model.

The National Juvenile Detention Association (NJDA), in a position statement dated, June, 2005, shared the following regarding juvenile detention schools:

The National Juvenile Detention Association (NJDA) advocates for quality education for youth in juvenile detention facilities. NJDA believes that every confined youth is entitled to quality education services, offered in a dedicated educational space, delivered by trained, state certified or licensed educational staff, working cooperatively with juvenile justice staff. Juvenile detention education should meet the requirements of the school from which the student would graduate. Quality juvenile detention education services should include assessment, remedial and grade-level instruction, special education and curriculum based on the individual needs of students. Educational information should follow the youth in preparation for the achievement of future academic and vocational objectives. Quality juvenile detention education should be delivered utilizing a variety of strategies, in accordance with learning theory regarding at-risk and delinquent youth, including hands-on, experiential learning, social skill development and service learning activities (pg.1).

A juvenile justice school will serve as the backdrop for the qualitative research focus on how African American males perceive their academic world and how they interpret their experiences. This work will provide students that have historically been placed in these programs, with an opportunity to provide insight as to what their experience is in a school supposedly designed to support them. Their experiences will provide insight for Jonesville Public Schools (JPS) to enhance or improve its instructional and social practices at the Jonesville Juvenile Detention Center, as well as for other educational leaders to use the voices of these students in the future development of alternative programs.
It is important to note that although this research is specific to JJDC, there are four other alternative sites accessible to students in Jonesville Public Schools. Each serves a specific role and population of students.

1. Alternative School Program*

The Alternative School Program is designed to equip students with the tools to manage their behavior and identify necessary resources needed to improve their academic achievement through (a) behavioral interventions, and supports and (b) therapeutic interventions and supports incorporated into the instructional day. The Program serves as a temporary placement for students whose matriculation in the traditional setting had been disrupted by various circumstances and also, based on a case by case basis, for students that request participation into the Program (Martin, 2016).

2. Group home Program

Group home is a short-term predispositional facility for adolescents thirteen to seventeen years old. Children are referred by the Jonesville Juvenile Domestic Relations District Court and the Jonesville Department of Social Services. Residents attend for a variety of reasons such as: difficulty at home or foster placement, delinquency, probation violation, or truancy; the common factor among them is they are in some form of crisis and need a long-term service plan and/or alternative placement. Group home is operated by the Juvenile Detention Commission of Jonesville. Funding is provided by the state and the City of Jonesville (Martin, 2016)
3. Technology Program*

The High School Technology is an exemplary learning community that provides high quality online curriculum through blended learning. It educates students using online and traditional methods within a comprehensive support structure that includes individualized and small group instruction, technology, meaningful relationships, and engaged learning. The High School Technology Program is designed to deliver a 21st century curriculum that is flexible in scheduling and student-centered in support. This opportunity prepares students to compete in the global marketplace, but with a down-to-earth approach that recognizes the challenges students face in completing their education (Everson, 2016).

4. Transitions Center

Jonesville Public Schools has developed a partnership with a neighboring jurisdiction, which hosts Transition Center programs at several locations throughout the county. These programs use a blended instructional model. The learning environment consists of a Virginia Department of Education approved online curriculum aligned with the Virginia Standards of Learning, combined with direct instruction following the district’s program of studies for each course.

These programs are designed to provide continued educational opportunities for students in grades 9-12 and on a more individualized basis for students in middle school. In addition, supplemental texts, project-based learning, and materials are designed to enhance the learning experience for each student. Through the use of success-oriented teaching methods and materials, small class size, a modified school day, and a structured
environment, these programs facilitate the students' positive growth and development in both academic and social skills.

Robin Ann Martin (2000) describes in her work, Paths of Learning: An Introduction to Educational Alternatives that most alternative schools have different expectations of their learners, but maintain a similar approach to the traditional school in providing instruction. In order for the experience to be an alternative to what was originally received, the practice must be modified. Hefner-Packer (1991), in Schargel & Smink (2013) studied models of alternative schools and described five:

1. The Alternative Classroom: a traditional self-contained classroom in a traditional school;

2. The School Within a School: this was popular in the 1980’s and 1990’s, and is still found today and is designed to be a specialized educational program;

3. The Separate Alternative School: this is a school separate from the regular school and one that provides different academic and social adjustment programs;

4. The Continuation School: developed for students not attending school anymore; and

5. The Magnet School: a self-contained program offering an intensified curriculum in one or more areas.
What is clear from these findings is that the Jonesville Juvenile Detention Center would be recognized as a separate alternative school. Mary Anne Raywid, (1994), in writing a synthesis of Research for Educational Leadership, described three other alternative program models. These were mentioned previously, but will be shared here to demonstrate the blending of Raywid’s models with that of Hefner-Packer.

1. Schools of Choice (Type 1): this offers specialized opportunities to students, usually in a magnet school. This approach is often applied to alternative schools that communities look at skeptically, but only because they are not sure how to label those attending. This is often the online school, or a magnet or charter site;

2. Last Chance Schools (Type 2): designed to provide services to disruptive students. These sites, of which JJDC fits this model, are not usually a student choice, like a School of Choice. Schools or programs like this often have a set time for students to attend, and offer little in academic or social flexibility;

3. Remedial Schools (Type 3): have a focus on student’s needs for academic remediation or social rehabilitation. This tends to be a more therapeutic setting than the first two, and because of this, may provide in home services, or a residential feature to the program.

The students at JJDC fall into model 3 of Hefner-Packers’ model, but also models 2 and 3 of Raywid’s models. The overlap of these models does not mean that JJDC lacks a clear focus or mission, but raises the question as to whether or not the implementation of the mission can occur with each student. What is clear from research from the National
Dropout Prevention Network is that alternative schools that are successful tend to have the following seven characteristics:

1. a maximum teacher/student ratio of 1:10;

2. a clearly stated mission and discipline code;

3. a caring faculty with continual staff development;

4. a school staff with high expectations for all learners;

5. a learning program specific to the student’s expectations and learning style

6. a flexible school schedule with community involvement;

7. a total commitment to have each student be a success (Reimer and Cash, 2003).

In summary, the design of JJDC clearly falls into a hybrid model when both the Hefner-Packer and Raywid’s models are applied. Research from the National Dropout Prevention Network supports 7 attributes of effective alternative schools, and as this research is conducted, will serve as a guide in assessing the success of JJDC, as well as in the design of future juvenile justice sites.

**African American Males in High School**

According to the Schott Report on Public Education and Black Males (2013), the social, educational, and economic outcomes for Black males have been more systematically devastating than the outcome for any racial or ethnic group or gender.
Black males have consistently low educational attainment levels, are more chronically unemployed and underemployed, are less healthy and have access to fewer healthcare resources, die much younger, and are many times more likely to be sent to jail for periods significantly longer than males of other racial/ethnic groups. On average, Black males are more likely to attend the most segregated and least resourced public schools. If one believes at their core that education is the great equalizer, then our education system needs an overhaul, and those providing any level of specialized instruction, (i.e. alternative education) must be aware of these facts and provide young Black men with the skills to succeed in school and life. This section will briefly provide an overview of four challenges faced by African American males nationally, and how an alternative program such as JJDCS can provide guidance to this population.

In an August 26, 2015 blog titled, 4 Troubling Truths About Black Boys and the U.S. Educational System, the author outlines 4 of the current realities for black males in K-12 schools today.

1. Black boys are more likely to be placed in special education. The author shares thoughts related to African American males starting school “behind” their white peers, and the impact that a field dominated by white women may have on the a lack of connection made with black male students. I agree with his sentiments, but he has left out not only the stigma often attached to students receiving special education services, but also the low achievement scores of students with this label. In JCPS, special education students, per the
2015 state Department of Education School Quality Profile, score less than their non-special education peers in all four content areas, and less than the state average in each area as well on the end of the year assessment (VDOE, 2015). This means that the JJDCS has a responsibility to reassess whether the child in their program that receives special education services should have that label, and then to determine whether or not the supports and strategies being used are sufficient to support him moving forward. As stated earlier, it also would be responsive to the student and receiving school, to inform them of any and all changes to the individual education plan and the progress made by the student.

2. Black boys are more likely to attend schools without adequate resources to educate them: Schools that have at least 50% of its population Black students, have only 48% of its staff certified in specific subjects, compared to 65% in white schools. What is absent in the piece is not just this aspect of instruction, but the building itself. Too often we see students in urban settings, attending schools that are substandard in their allocation of resources, building maintenance, and support programs, including interscholastic sports, fine arts, and tutoring services as well. The staff of the JJDCS is an experienced team of educators, with an average of nine years as educators, and four years at JJDCS.

3. Black boys are not reading at an adequate level: Only 14% of African American eighth graders score at or above the proficient level. These results
reveal that millions of young people cannot understand or evaluate text, provide relevant details, or support inferences about the written documents that they read (Thompson, 2013). Findings from the 2013 National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) found that 46% of white students are “adequate readers” by eighth grade, but just 17% of Black students as a whole earned this mark. As we look at the academic supports being provided at the JJDCS, the implementation of co-teaching and project based learning are strategies to address these deficiencies. However, a more comprehensive approach to this issue must be enacted to address this. Completing the Standardized Test for the Assessment of Reading (STAR) provides the school and student with an understanding of the level of progress made, but questions related to direct instructional supports, access to a media rich environment, remediation interventions, and the skill sets of each educator must be evaluated as well.

4. Punishment for black boys is harsher than for any other demographic: This has been documented for more than a century, and the author cites the increased use of law enforcement in schools as well as the justifications used for suspension and expulsion for black boys being based more on the judgement of an educator than the facts of a situation. For example, black males in JCPS are suspended at a higher rate for class disruption, defiance, and insubordination at an almost 3:1 rate than their white and Latino peers (Martin, 2016). There are a number of programs being implemented both
locally and nationally to try and curtail this epidemic, (Restorative Practices, My Brother’s Keeper, Intramural sports, Big Brother/Big Sister programs, to name a few) but one piece consistently absent in the work being done in JCPS is the dissemination of information on how to support black males to the larger community, and more specifically, parents. The JJDCS holds regular student conferences with students to discuss academic progress, but perhaps a greater piece needs to be dedicated to support post placement for the student and access to community programs and support personnel.

Tavis Smiley, a talk show host, activist, and author, presented in a 2014 Tavis Smiley Reports episode, *To Important to Fail*, the following statistics about black males:

1. 54% of African Americans graduate from high school, compared to more than three quarters of white and Asian students.

2. On average, African American twelfth grade students read at the same level as white eighth grade students.

3. Nationally, African American male students in grades K-12 were nearly 2.5 times as likely to be suspended from school in 2000 as white students.

In Jonesville, African American males are suspended at a higher rate than any other group in the city (Martin, 2015). An August 2013 Sentencing Report on Racial Disparities in the US Criminal Justice System, (cite) submitted to the United Nations, found that one of every three black American males born today can expect to go to prison in his lifetime.” This research will not provide educators with a silver bullet to answer the
dilemma faced by this student, but may allow us to ensure that our support network is greatly expanded to ensure that students like this have an opportunity for a future that they manage, and not somebody else.

**Disproportionate Minority Contact (DMC)**

The study of disproportionality as it relates to African American exposure to the justice system has been well researched over the past 75 years. Many states and specific localities have worked to address this issue through the development of community and school based programs or initiatives designed to address the question: why do we find youth from various racial and ethnic groups overrepresented at various contact points in the juvenile justice system? This question will serve as a guide in first defining and offering a historical timeline of the Juvenile Justice Delinquency Prevention Act, findings from a 2010 state assessment of DMC, and strategies that could be utilized at the JJDCS to address DMC.

**Definition and Timeline**

Disproportionate minority contact is defined as the disproportionate number of minority youth whose lives come into contact with the juvenile justice system (Hanes, 2012). The Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (OJJDP) provides support to jurisdictions in addressing this issue through its Formula Grants program under Title II, part B of the Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention Act of 1974. In 1988, this act was amended to require states to develop and implement plans to reduce the proportion of minority youth detained or confined in secure facilities, jails, and lockups if
they exceeded the percentage of minority youth in the general population (Hanes, 2012). This act was again amended in 1992, tying funding to the compliance of the above requirements, and then in 2002, Congress expanded the requirement from “confinement” to “contact.” This forced states to address juvenile delinquency prevention efforts and systems improvement efforts designed to reduce, without establishing or requiring numerical standards or quotas, the disproportionate number of juvenile members of the minority groups who come in contact with the juvenile justice system (Section 223 (a) 22). The OJJDP has developed a five phase model to determine if DMC is prevalent in their community, and then if found to be present, a model to guide to reduce the issue. These are the steps in the model: (Haynes, 2012).
Table 3. Disproportionate Minority Contact Reduction Model

1. Identification: This part of the model asks states/jurisdictions, using the relative rate index, to calculate disproportionality at 9 points in the juvenile justice system (arrest, referral to court, diversion, case petitioned, secure detention, delinquency finding, probation, confinement in a secure correctional facility, and case transferred, certified, and waived to adult criminal court). This then gives a number that compares minority to majority youth and if that number exceeds a “1”, then you are found to be disproportionate. If your jurisdiction is found to be disproportionate, you move to the assessment/diagnosis phase.
2. Assessment/Diagnosis: States come together to determine what are the contributing factors to DMC.

3. Intervention: In phase III, specific plans are designed to address delinquency. What have been found to be effective prevention and intervention activities include:

Table 4. Intervention Strategies to Address Delinquency

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Prevention and intervention strategies</th>
<th>Systemic improvement strategies</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Diversion</td>
<td>Advocation of legislative reforms</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alternatives to secure confinement</td>
<td>Administrative change</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Advocacy</td>
<td>Policy change</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cultural competency training</td>
<td>Procedural modifications</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Review of staffing practices</td>
<td>Implementation of structural decision-making tools at various points within the juvenile justice system</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

4. Evaluation: This phase is the unbiased evaluation of the implementation of the above programs and their effectiveness.

5. Monitoring: Phase V looks at any and all modifications in state demographics and its impact on DMC trends and then how to modify the plans created to support these changes.

The goal of this work is to ensure that each and every youth that enters into the juvenile justice system receives fair and equal treatment, regardless of their background. However, in 2010, the state Jonesville is in conducted a statewide assessment of DMC.
This report, titled, Statewide Assessment of Disproportionate Minority Contact in the State Juvenile Justice System, found that African American youth represented 22.8% of the population and accounted for the following as it related to the juvenile justice system:

1. 44.4% of the referrals to court
2. 56.7% of the cases involving secure detention
3. 44.6% of cases petitioned
4. 47.7% of delinquent findings
5. 66.1% of cases resulting in the youth being placed in a secure juvenile correctional facility.

African American youth in the state of the study were referred to court double the amount of their white peers, detained more than twice as often as whites, and were offered a probationary sanction at a lower rate as well (Harig et al, 2012). The students at the Jonesville Juvenile Detention Center are provided the opportunity to receive an education and participate in social activities specific to this type of institution (i.e. access to television, computer games, and physical education), but in order to address the recommendations of the assessment team from the 2012 study, JJDC staff should enhance their skills in the following areas:

1. Cultural Competence training for the staff, including the detention center staff:

   With the diverse backgrounds of the population of students at JJDC, it would be irresponsible to not provide professional learning sessions for the staff in this area.
2. Parent outreach: Too often, families that have a child that is placed in a juvenile justice center, speak with the student and staff on two occasions: intake and when the student exits. JJDC has an opportunity to improve the discourse with families and not rely on outside agencies, (i.e. probation officers, mental health providers, mentors) to support the student and family while present.

3. Staff/ Site Recognition: The staff of JJDC has been recognized by former Attorney General Eric Holder, as well as had two instructional staff members nominated for Washington Post Teacher of the Year Awards, but unfortunately, very few in the community are familiar with the work of this staff. This team should begin to promote some of the excellent work that it has done and how they serve the community.

4. Advocacy: JJDC staff should work with the school system, as well as the Virginia Department of Juvenile Justice, and Court Services Unit of the jurisdictions feeding into the facility, to begin to implement some of the recommendations from the 2012 report on DMC.

The above recommendations will not eliminate DMC in the region, but will begin to provide an internal plan for the facility and its staff. These, coupled with the instructional strategies utilized at the center will serve it well in providing an environment that does more than houses its students, and actually strengthens them academically and socially.
Culturally Responsive Pedagogy (CRP)

Culturally responsive pedagogy connects students’ cultural knowledge, prior experiences, and performance styles to academic knowledge and intellectual tools in ways that legitimize what students already know. Culturally responsive teachers negotiate classrooms cultures with their students that reflect the communities where students develop and grow (Gay, 2000). Howard and Terry, (2001), share that culturally responsive teaching is more than just a way of teaching, or a simple set of practices embedded in curriculum lessons and units.

Practitioners who seek to reduce culturally responsive teaching to a simple act fail to recognize the intricacies of the concept. CRP embodies a professional, political, cultural, ethical, and ideological disposition that superseded mundane teaching acts, but is centered in fundamental beliefs about teaching, learning, students, their families, their communities, and an underlying commitment to see student success become less rhetoric, and more of a reality. CRP is situated in a framework that recognizes the rich and varied cultural wealth, knowledge, and skills that diverse students bring to schools, and seeks to develop dynamic teaching practices, multicultural content, multiple means of assessment, and a philosophical view of teaching that is dedicated to nurturing student academic, social, emotional, cultural, psychological, and physiological well-being (350).

The incorporation of CRP into the classroom is often seen to many as important and valuable to the entire school community. The implementation of CRP in the classroom is often seen as a challenge however. Whether, as Howard and Terry note, (344), that at an in-service, a teacher asked: Can you just show how me to do it? Referring to the implementation of CRP, or as Ladson-Billings, (1994) shares that any teacher who thinks that doing this work is easy, probably is not actually a quality educator in the first place.
In excerpts from the KnowLoom: Educators Sharing and Lecturing Together, researchers at Brown University (2008) provided insight from case studies on culturally responsive practices. In this document, they outline 9 areas that effective educators do in providing students with a learning environment that is culturally responsive:

1. Communication of High Expectations to all students
2. Utilize Active Teaching Methods
3. Serve as a facilitator of learning and not “the sage on the stage”
4. Possesses positive perspectives on parents and families of culturally and linguistically diverse students
5. Is culturally sensitive
6. Works to reshape the curriculum to meet the needs of the learners
7. Uses culturally mediated instruction
8. Allows students to control classroom discourse
9. Utilizes small group instruction and academically related discourse

In a July 2014 report from Aceves and Orosco, culturally responsive teaching matched with the emerging evidenced based practices of collaborative teaching, responsive feedback, modeling, and instructional scaffolding, have shown to assist students in practicing what they were taught and help to shape student identity. Additionally, at the core of culturally responsive classrooms is the development of a climate that is caring, and respectful, and values the culture of the student. It should be noted that the students have historically shared that where there is a sense of trust and care from adults, that
there is a greater level of academic success and less interruptions to the learning environment.

One area often related to CRP is the idea of cultural competence or cultural proficiency. This is having an awareness of one’s own cultural identity and views about difference, and the ability to learn and build on the varying cultural and community norms of students and their families. It is the ability to understand the within-group differences that make each student unique, while celebrating the between-group variations that make our country a tapestry. This understanding informs and expands teaching practices in the culturally competent educator’s classroom (NEA, 2015). In a presentation by Vivian Stith-Williams (2009) on the importance of cultural competence in the classroom, she shared that the following is in place when staffs have moved to a place of cultural competence:

1. Educators learn as much as they can about a student’s or family’s culture, while recognizing the influence of their own background on their responses to cultural differences.

2. Include neighborhood and community outreach efforts and involve community cultural leaders if possible.

3. Work within each student’s family structure, which may include grandparents, other relatives and friends.

4. Recognize, accept, and when appropriate, incorporate the role of community volunteers.
5. Understand the different expectations people may have about the way services are offered (for example, a period of social conversation may be necessary before each contact with a person; or access to a family may be gained only through an elder)

6. Adhere to traditions relating to gender and age that may play a part in certain cultures.

Employing any number of these strategies would be a paradigm shift for the staff at JJDCS, as they are often simply receivers of information regarding the students that they serve and accept the current position of the student as static. That is to say, that their current situation is where they will remain for the remainder of their lives. The infusion of cultural competence into the equation fortifies the potential bonds that can develop between the educator, student, and family, and if done correctly, assist in changing the trajectory of the student.

CRP is at the core of this research. In order for African American males to succeed in an alternative school, there must be a clear understanding of the purpose and mission of the school, and at the core of student achievement, is the student. Through implementation of CRP, disciplinary practices could be more clearly defined, and move away from the punitive nature in which many are addressed today. One is more likely to monitor the behavior of students in a supportive, corrective, growth development method when they have a relationship with the child, which is at the foundation of CRP. Lastly, in addressing the needs of African American males in an alternative setting, understanding the community in which they arrive from every day, and the determination
and background knowledge that they possess, would be key in developing an instructional rapport with the student. This rapport would lead to an enriching experience for both the educator and the student.

Research Context

Research Site

The Jonesville Juvenile Detention Center (JJDCS) is a secure, pre and post disposition, 46 bed facility serving adolescents in Virginia (Allen, 2016). Historically, the students in attendance participate from three neighboring school districts. It is important to note, that for this study, only students that attend Jonesville City Public Schools will serve as potential participants. The information presented will be broken into three categories to enhance understanding of the design of this institution. The first is the organization of the JJDCS. This will detail the five units that house the students, and how each differs from the other. Second, the staff of JJDCS will be presented, to include the specialists providing support to the students. Third, the academic and social programs, to include interventions will be shared.
Organization of JJDCS

JJDCS is divided into five units, each hosting a different population of students.

Table 5. JJDC Units

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>UNIT</th>
<th>STUDENT PARTICIPANT</th>
<th>LENGTH OF STAY</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Unit 1</td>
<td>Predisposition males age 13-18 and typically from local school districts.</td>
<td>Average length of stay is 24 days</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unit 2</td>
<td>Female students that are 13 and older usually from local school systems.</td>
<td>Average length of stay is 24 days</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unit 3</td>
<td>Office of Refugee Resettlement/Division of Children’s Services program students.</td>
<td>Average length of stay is 25 days.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Students aged 12-18 may be placed in this program.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unit 4</td>
<td>Office of Refugee Resettlement/Division of Children’s Services program students.</td>
<td>Average length of stay is 25 days.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Students aged 12-18 may be placed in this program.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unit 7</td>
<td>Pre and post disposition students that are participating in the New Beginnings Program. Both male and female students participate in this program, typically from local school districts.</td>
<td>Average stay is 180 days, but can be less if students are successful in the New Beginnings Program.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

It is important to note that although the majority of students attend the three neighboring school systems, additional students can be placed from the greater Washington DC metro area, including Maryland. It should also be noted that the JJDCS is one of a handful of facilities across the country that hosts a Federal Office of Refugee Resettlement/ Division
of Children’s Services (ORR/DCS) program. This program provides support to students and young non K-12 adults that had or have involvement with the justice system that could impact their immigration status. The attendance for this program (ORR) fluctuates greatly, but the maximum number of students that can participate is thirty.

During the 2012-14 school years, there were 539 males and 144 females that attended JJDC. A review of the demographics of this population demonstrates a disproportionate number of minorities and males that were incarcerated. Unfortunately, this has not changed in the past three years. According to Dr. Janet Allen, Principal of the JJDCS, the demographics are consistent. “Although the numbers have decreased, the percentages have not changed significantly in the past 3-4 years.” (Allen interview, 2017).
Table 6. Enrollment at JJDCS 2012-14

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>POPULATION</th>
<th>MALE</th>
<th>FEMALE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Hispanic/ Latino (any age)</td>
<td>185</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Amer. Indian/Alaska Native</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black or African American</td>
<td>205</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>125</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Population Totals</strong></td>
<td><strong>539</strong></td>
<td><strong>144</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Specialized Programs

Students w Disabilities 122 35
Section 504 only 1 1
Limited English Proficient 245 55

(Kendall- Wilson, 2013).

Students, regardless of their length of stay, which may vary from less than 24 hours to more than 6 months, reside in the center. Each detainee is assigned a room that includes a toilet and sink as well as a raised concrete slab with a modified mattress that serves as their bed. Each room has a window allowing detention center personnel to view the student, but the student is unable able to see out clearly, as the window is designed in such a way to exclude this opportunity. The rooms do not have a window to see out into the community, nor do the residents have lights that they control. The light provided is monitored and under the direction of the facility, with each inmate having a specific time for the lights to turn on and off each day. The lights are dimmed in the evening, but allow
enough light for the staff of the center to clearly view the students. Students in units I, II, III and IV are allowed a blanket, but are not permitted to bring any other items into their rooms. Students in the New Beginnings program are, if he or she has achieved a certain level (based on academics and social skills demonstrated), able to bring books, personal grooming materials and personal clothing into their rooms.

Students are required to take showers each evening, for a total of five minutes. At this time, the clothes that they have been wearing for that day are traded for a pair of shorts and t-shirt to sleep in. Should a student require additional clothing, i.e. sweatpants, those are provided. 6:00 AM is the time when students are awoken and the process of having students eat breakfast, have a morning meeting and converse with their peers occurs prior to going to classes at 8:00.

Recent policies have been implemented to ensure that students are provided access to the educational program and to their units as much as possible. In previous years, students that did not follow directions could be placed into their rooms for multiple days if needed, with minimal access to their peers. These students would be provided food in their rooms as well as educational materials and resources, all the while, being monitored by a detention staff member.

The units that the students reside in are designed to build a community, with each being outfitted with staff and resources to provide educational and recreational support to the students. For example, students may play cards with one another if a successful day of school work has been completed, or use the computer to play a game or watch a video
(monitored for proper usage). Academic supports in the way of tutoring and study halls are used as well. This is a more informal setting for the students and one that potentially allows for camaraderie not only with their peers, but with the detention staff assigned to their unit.

**Staff**

Each student in the JJDCS is enrolled in school upon their entry. The school, which is supported by licensed teachers and specialists from Jonesville City Public Schools, approaches educational programming from the premise that for many of the students, the opportunity to engage in this educational program offers the chance for remediation and to reconnect the student to the formal education process (Kendal-Wilson, 2013). The staff of JJDCS consists of an instructional team of 8 members, and six additional specialists providing a multitude of supports to the students.

**Table 7. Staff at JJDCS**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CORE TEACHER</th>
<th>SPECIALIST</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Math</td>
<td>Special Education (2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Science</td>
<td>ELL</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Studies</td>
<td>Post-Disposition/ Transition Coordinator</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>English</td>
<td>Literacy Coach</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Health/PE</td>
<td>Art Therapist</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
As employees of Jonesville City Public Schools, the instructional staff is compensated through this school system, but the city of Jonesville is reimbursed for all expenses, including salaries and benefits of these individuals (Kendal-Wilson, 2013). In the eyes of this researcher, this arrangement could lead to ethical questions regarding the determination as to whether or not students should be placed at the detention center. As more students attend, there is more money needed to serve the population, meaning a greater source of revenue for the city.

**Academic and Social Programs**

The school works to ensure that each classroom maintains no larger than a 1:12 staff to student ratio. In each classroom, there is a detention specialist, who is there to provide support to both staff and students in cases of classroom disruption. All core classrooms are co-taught in multi age, ability and grade instructional settings. Co-teaching enables teachers to be more responsive to the needs of diverse learners by increasing the content area knowledge of instructional strategies and differentiation (Kendal-Wilson, 2). In the program highlights document from the detention center, teachers shared that co-teaching increases student engagement and the amount of time in which meaningful instruction takes place (Kendal-Wilson, 2).

**Program Orientation:** Upon arrival to the program, each student is required to complete the STAR Reading and Math tests. According to Renaissance Learning, the designer of these assessments, the STAR reading assessment tracks development in five areas, word knowledge and skills, comprehension strategies and constructing meaning,
analyzing literary text, understanding author’s craft, and analyzing argument and evaluating text. The STAR Math assessment tracks development in the following areas: number and operations, algebra, geometry and measurement, and data analysis, statistics, and probability (Renaissance Learning, 2008). This testing is then done every 30 days to monitor progress and make any instructional adjustments to enhance the skills in these areas. JJDCS teachers, according to a 2013 report, felt that enrollment in the educational program often plays a key role in facilitating positive change, because it may lead the youth to experience, possibly for the first time, academic success that can enhance feelings of self-worth and improving problem solving abilities (Kendal-Wilson, 2103). By monitoring student progress, any changes that need to be utilized to support growth, can be done in a timely fashion.

Classroom Design: With the classes being multi-grade, a project based learning approach is utilized to engage the students in learning. At JJDCS, a complex question is presented, and students are then asked to develop a response, either individually, or in collaboration with another student or students. This particular model affords the teachers the opportunity to provide individualized support to the learner; supporting the strengths that each has in crafting their responses to the question. Students at JJDCS also participate in an advisory period each morning, where students work with staff to set individual goals, discuss events pertinent to the students, and engage in a comprehensive character education program. It should be noted that when the school places students into its classes, it modifies the traditional housing unit placement, and when needed combines students of like ability and age into compatible units.
Table 8. Typical Student Schedule at JJDCS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TIME</th>
<th>Period</th>
<th>Unit 1 Younger Males and Females</th>
<th>Unit 2 Older Males</th>
<th>Unit 3 ORR</th>
<th>Unit 4 ORR</th>
<th>Unit 7 New Beginnings</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>8:00-8:10</td>
<td>AD</td>
<td>Advisory</td>
<td>Advisory</td>
<td>Advisory</td>
<td>Advisory</td>
<td>Advisory</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8:10-8:55</td>
<td>1st</td>
<td>English</td>
<td>Art Ther.</td>
<td>Literacy</td>
<td>ELL English.</td>
<td>PE</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8:55-9:45</td>
<td>2nd</td>
<td>Science</td>
<td>Literacy</td>
<td>Art Ther.</td>
<td>ELL Reading</td>
<td>Math</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9:45-10:35</td>
<td>3rd</td>
<td>Math</td>
<td>English</td>
<td>Soc. St.</td>
<td>PE</td>
<td>Art Ther.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Lunch</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2:08-2:50</td>
<td>7th</td>
<td>Literacy</td>
<td>PE</td>
<td>Science</td>
<td>Art Ther.</td>
<td>Reading</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Researcher Assumptions and Context

As an educator and member of a large extended family, I have been witness to family members, friends, and now students that have experienced periods of their lives in a juvenile justice setting. Their experiences, shared both orally and through first hand visits, prompted me to enhance my understanding of their lives during confinement and that of their families as well. Although each situation was unique to that particular person, I marveled at three commonalities in their tales:

1. Although each had been told by various people that there would be an
opportunity to still pursue their dreams, none felt they would be achieved.

2. Regardless of whether the person was now an adult or the story was from a student, I was surprised to hear how each was unfamiliar with what would occur in their lives next. In other words, each detailed the ambiguity in their placement and the uncertainty in their futures after leaving detention.

3. Because of the ambiguity in terms of communication related to release dates, transition planning, and support from the community, each shared that they had lost a sense of hope and trust from and with people that they considered to be their allies.

Each of these findings drove me as a young educator to ask the question, “How do I instill hope in those that may lack this trait?” To answer this, I found myself working tirelessly to build strong bonds with my students and their families, but unfortunately, when I recognized a student with what I deemed to be a lack of hope, I tried to build their value through the value of less challenging tasks. For example, as a fourth grade teacher, I would often provide one student in particular with prompts to answers to questions that I would ask. My goal was to make her build a positive self-image and provide her with a sound academic sense in the classroom. It wasn’t until a mentor teacher shared with me that in my zeal to accommodate, that I may have actually been doing more harm than good. This was later confirmed when this student told me how my actions made her feel as though I thought she was dumb, and that my efforts often caused her to remain silent in class due to embarrassment. The impact of this revelation has been significant and forced me to take a different tact in my personal and professional life.
As I matured as an educator and was introduced to more students and their life situations, my approach to instilling a sense of hope changed. First, I learned that there is a fine line between supporting a student from a strength based approach, or as I was doing, trying to work with students as if they were deficient of something, and that I was some sort of a Svengali that would raise them from their existence to a life of prosperity and fulfillment. Secondly, I learned to listen. with my former approach, I presumed to have all of the answers, and at times, that was not possible, but my insistence on serving as guide for the student often would not allow me to see that. Third, by learning that the student brought more to the table than I assumed, I was able to better serve them, and in turn, become a better educator and person.

As a sitting principal, I have had the opportunity to meet with many students and their families that are involved with the juvenile justice system. With that knowledge comes assumptions that I have made regarding working with this population of students, and my hope is to dispel not only my assumptions, but provide a more accurate picture to the reader of the educational experience of a cohort of students that have been enrolled in one juvenile justice center. To ensure that my assumptions don’t cloud my judgement, I have worked with a strong group of professional and personal colleagues to challenge my thinking and assumptions and provide guidance in areas related to the court services process, juvenile intake, instructional strategies, trauma informed care of juvenile populations, design of alternative programs, and the true picture of overrepresentation of black males in the justice system.
Entry into the Research Site

My introduction to the Jonesville Juvenile Detention Center occurred in my previous position as a central office employee for the district. One aspect of my role was to assist in the transition of students from the JJDC back into the public school system. As I worked with these students, and their families, as well as the staff of the center, I was able to gather some information about the center, including perceptions from families and the students, but very little about the day to day experience of the students. For close to a year, I would meet with these students, but due to changes in the administration of the school district, as well as changes in the leadership of the detention center, a visit to learn more was not permitted.

Once the administration issue was addressed, my first visit of the new school year was to the detention center. I was humbled to see the living quarters of the students, as well as the requirements (jump suit to be worn all day, hands behind your back as you move through the hallway, not being issued a writing utensil until noted by the instructor, and being escorted to the restroom) that the students had to adhere to each and every minute. But what I was really looking to understand was why or how so many of the students that had historically underachieved prior to their placement, were now earning the highest grades they ever had, and also what was the impact of this success as they exited the program?

In order to conduct my research at this facility, I knew that a relationship would need to be forged between the administrative staff of the center, the teaching staff, and students. To forge a bond with the students, I began to visit on a regular basis, speaking
with students about programs that were accessible to them upon their exit, as well as communicating with their base school to prepare for their transition. With the instructional staff, I was able to coordinate professional development sessions at the center, as well as assist as a judge of student poetry slams and essay competitions. I also observed teachers and provide insights into their instructional growth.

JJDC is divided into two parts: the school and the detention center. The school provides academic guidance to the students, while the detention component addresses more of the legal matters of the students and the day to day living conditions. As such, there are two lead administrators. The first is the director of the center and the other being the principal of the school. My relationship with the principal was positive as we had worked together on a few committees as well as participated in district wide professional development together. The director of the program and I had met due to a concern raised by the instructional staff, but we had been able to conduct our business with one another professionally and I was looking forward to working with him as this research moved forward. Unfortunately, he passed in January, and now a new acting director is in place to provide leadership to the program. Although the acting director and I have not worked with one another in this setting, we are familiar with one another through a number of community programs, and she is looking forward to hearing the results of the study.
CHAPTER 3: METHODS

Overview

This chapter presents the methods used for my qualitative inquiry into the lived experiences of a cohort of African American males in a juvenile justice school. I begin with the process used in the selection of participants and then move into a detailed description of the interview protocol and process. The remainder of this chapter details the analytic approach used to interpret the findings from the interviews conducted.

Selection of Participants

A sample of 12 students was eligible to participate in the study. In order to participate, students had to meet the following criteria:

1. Identify as an African-American male
2. Currently be enrolled in grades 9-12
3. Agree to participate
4. Have parental consent to be a part of the study
5. Have been enrolled in the JJDC in the past two years

The sample used for this study included 10 students who met all the criteria. The student participants consisted of three 9th graders, four 10th graders, one 11th grader, and two 12th grade students. The students ranged in age from 14 to 19. 4 of the students have an IEP, and two had a 504 Plan (a plan designed to assist students with disabilities to get the accommodations needed to be successful in their academic environment).
Table 9. Student Participants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Grade</th>
<th>Initial placement in detention center</th>
<th>Student with an IEP</th>
<th>Student 504 Plan</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>no</td>
<td>no</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>no</td>
<td>no</td>
<td>no</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>no</td>
<td>no</td>
<td>yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>no</td>
<td>no</td>
<td>no</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>no</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>no</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>no</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>no</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>no</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>no</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18</td>
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<td>no</td>
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<td>yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>no</td>
<td>no</td>
<td>no</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Data Collection Interview Protocol and Process

Before I conducted the student interviews, I created a protocol for the interviews (see Appendix). The protocol was designed to address my research questions, but in order to explore the experiences of the youth more broadly it also built on the literature tied to the topic and on my personal interactions with African American males who had been or currently were in detention. The interview protocol was evaluated and reviewed for validity in three ways:

1. Once the interview questions were developed, I presented one of the interview transcripts to one of my classes as part of an assignment. The role of the students in the
class was to determine if the questions addressed the three research questions that I had developed. This review provided me with valuable insight and assisted in the development of the final interview questions presented.

2. Following this analysis by my peers, I had three peers familiar with the students at the detention center analyze the questions to assess their validity in addressing the question: Do these questions measure the varied academic and social experiences of the students in the program? This team labored over the number of questions, and how one would need to perhaps be a more skilled interviewer to solicit the desired response with the questions presented in the format that they were in. These findings from the group led me to modify the questions even further, eliminating three questions, and adding two.

3. I then had the same group of evaluators participate in a mock interview using the newly developed questions. Each shared that the questions would provide sufficient responses to answer the first two interview questions; how do African American male high schoolers narrate their experience of attending a juvenile justice education program; what perceptions do these students have regarding the academic and social supports provided during their placement.

Prior to the interview taking place, each student was informed of the purpose of the study and what their role would entail. Following this, those that agreed to participate declared their intent and parent permission was sought. Once parental permission was granted, then the interview process began with the students.
Interviews

Before the interviews began, I reviewed the purpose of the research again to the students as well as outlined supports for each of them should a response solicit a negative reaction and the student or I determine that support from a support staff (counselor, social worker, school psychologist, or nurse) is necessary. I also informed each student that their participation in the study will not provide them with an expedited release from the program or give them an advantage over those who did not participate. At this time, I also discussed the confidentiality of their participation and responses, as well as their right to end their participation if they wanted to for any reason. Lastly, I shared that their responses would be recorded and placed the recorder on the table so that they were clear on this aspect of the interview process, and that if they requested, a copy of their transcript could be provided to them.

The interviews used a semi-structured protocol—one that addressed the necessary information needed to answer my research questions while also providing space to explore areas of importance that I had not anticipated. This was intentional and was utilized to glean the most insight possible from the participants. One of my goals in the interview process was to build a rapport with each student, so the open-ended format of the questions was intended to solicit a deeper response than a simple yes or no answer.

During the interviews, I found the students to be overall quite forthcoming with information. My initial interview was “choppy” and lacked a flow to it, and at its conclusion, the student noted this. He shared that, “I should chill a little and wait. Let us answer (Student interview, 1).” As I moved into subsequent interviews, I kept this in
mind and worked to establish a rapport with each student, as well as providing wait time for responses. During the interviews, my style of questioning had to change to meet the learning style of the student. For example, with one interview, I changed my follow up questions from, “can you give more detail to that answer?” to a very specific follow up question intended to solicit more detail.

**Document Review**

To enhance my understanding of the overall academic achievement of the participants in the study, I reviewed disciplinary logs (to include student referrals, suspensions, both in-school and out of school, and interventions provided to the students), student report cards, comments, and interim (mid-quarter) academic progress reports. Rubin and Rubin (2013) share that since nearly every documentary archive is spotty and incomplete, this will provide an opportunity to gain a general understanding of the academic history of the participants. Additionally, I reviewed the individual education plans of students in the study as well as those that had 504 plans. Included in the review of these documents was also anecdotal information about the students that included intervention plans like Functional Behavior Assessments and Behavior Intervention Plans for some. This information is included in the descriptions of the students in the analysis section of this chapter. This review raised a major concern regarding these students and the academic supports they are provided, as many of the cumulative student information files were incomplete. Specifically, almost all had discipline files, but in many cases, the academic transcript of the students was incomplete, which raises questions as to the courses in which the student should be enrolled, graduation requirements, whether or not academic
planning has occurred, and these findings support one of my major concerns about the respect that this particular cohort of students receives.

**Member Check Interview**

Traditionally, the member check has been used in order to assess the accuracy with which a researcher has represented a participant’s subjectivity (Koelsch, 2013). The summarization of the interviews with the participants in a non-formal setting was designed to help clarify and validate my understanding of the participants’ views. It allowed me to ensure that my interpretations of their words were accurate and it helped to clarify any statements that were unclear. The member check also was an opportunity to reconnect with the participant and provide an update on the progress of the research as well as to confirm their continued commitment to the work. Although brief, (many lasted less than 15 minutes), I was humbled by how prideful each student felt in being a part of something that they felt was of importance. Student three, in particular, shared with a number of his teachers and friends that he was a part of research to help kids like him.
CHAPTER 4: INTERVIEW RESULTS

Data Analysis

My data analysis focused on getting the students to share details of their experiences in a juvenile detention school. Following each interview, I would re-read each transcript to gain a familiarity with the responses of the students and begin to look for themes and also note questions that I may have had regarding a response. This re-read also allowed me to critique my own interview style and assess areas that could use modifications. Once all interviews were completed, I used REV, a transcription company that maintains strict confidentiality standards with its data (Rev.com.). Once the transcripts were returned, I re-read to ensure that each was correct and to note if any portions of the interview were not recognized in the transcript. Following the readings, I began to code the information using my questions as a guide. For example, the questions related to a typical day at the facility were grouped into one section, while questions tied to student discipline were placed in another. My process did not include the use of coding software, but instead, I completed this by hand. I would remove the section of the transcript from the document, and place it with an identifier as to who the response was from on a larger paper that contained the question and other responses. This allowed me to begin to recognize similarities in responses and also assist in the coding process.

Open Coding

The data was organized using a coding system that allowed me to generate a set of 28 codes. These open codes, defined as codes derived from the interview data itself rather than from predetermined theory or prior research, placed all of the statements into like
categories, and allowed me to capture the essence of what the students were sharing and assisted in my gaining a large-scale view of their experiences. My analysis at this stage also allowed me to mentally begin to pare down categories and recognize consistency in themes that were becoming more apparent. With certain statements, there were some that contained multiple ideas and because of this, received more than one code.

Table 10. List of Open Codes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>GROUP A: STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT</th>
<th>GROUP C : STUDENT SOCIAL EXPERIENCE/ PEER INTERACTIONS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A1. Future Plans</td>
<td>C16. Female</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A2. Course selection</td>
<td>C17. Sports</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A3. Teachers</td>
<td>C18. Role Models</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A4. Resources</td>
<td>C19. Lunch</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A5. Technology</td>
<td>C20. Safety (lack of)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A6. Instruction</td>
<td>GROUP D: PROGRAM STRUCTURE</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GROUP B: STUDENT EMOTIONS</td>
<td>D22. Building</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B8. Sadness</td>
<td>D23. School Start time and End time</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B10. Perspective of base school staff</td>
<td>D25. Family Involvement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B12. Hostility Towards the Program</td>
<td>GROUP E: FUTURE GOALS/ASPIRATIONS (STUDENTS)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Following this initial coding grouping, I broke these 28 codes down into five broader themes that began to capture the essence of the students’ experiences. To get to these five themes, I first had to categorize some of the open codes into larger clusters. For example, the open codes of teachers, technology, instruction, and frustration, became the
larger theme of ACADEMIC SUCCESS. The other four clusters were STUDENT SUPPORT TEAM ACCESS, INTELLIGENCE LEVEL, TEACHER SUPPORT, and ASSISTANCE FROM TEACHERS. As these thematic codes emerged there was supporting data in additional open codes that I developed. Each of these codes provided a level of clarity to the specifics of the students’ experiences in the detention center.

**Coding Validity**

As I was the lone researcher on this project, I wanted to ensure that the coding process I followed addressed two areas:

1. Did the essence of what the students shared get captured in my coding?
2. Did I select the correct statements or representations from the students to present to the readers in order for them to understand my analysis and arguments?

In order to ensure this, it is important to note the process I completed in coding their statements. First, I read and re-read the interview transcripts. Second, to ensure that I had heard the information from the students accurately, I conducted member check interviews with them within one week of the interviews. These member checks were invaluable in providing me with clarity to questions that arose during my initial reading of the interview. For example, in one interview, a student shared that he had an Individualized Education Plan (IEP), but did not know if it was important since he was incarcerated. He then went on to share that it’s not like anybody helps him anyway. In the member check interview, I checked his statement with my placement in my coding process, and the two did not match based on his reflection of the statement. He was sharing his frustration with the teaching staff, where I initially thought it related more closely to course selection.
Another example came when a student shared that he wanted to be clear that his outlook on life was no better or worse since he had been in detention previously. The point he was making was not one of frustration, but of the lack of support he receives from the detention staff and the teachers.

In addition to the re-reading and member checks, I was able to present an example of my codes and supporting documentation to the students of my doctoral cohort. This was an invaluable activity, as it allowed for the group to raise questions that challenged my perceptions not only of the codes being used, but how I was organizing my themes. This presentation caused me to change two of the codes and reevaluate a host of others.

Interview Findings

The interview findings are first displayed using a map that displays the open codes and the supporting codes associated with each. Each of the themes were apparent in the interviews from the beginning and expressed a need for not only academic support, which was noted in the ACADEMIC SUCCESS theme, but also to recognize support personnel in the building that could aid in addressing emotional needs which falls under the theme of STUDENT SUPPORT TEAM ACCESS. One area of significance for the students was the perception of their own intelligence upon arrival, and then as they departed, which is represented by the theme INTELLIGENCE LEVEL. The final two themes relate to the direct interaction of teachers with the students. The first, TEACHER ACADEMIC SUPPORT, is focused on the areas of relationship building and learning styles and how those are used to drive the instruction. ASSISTANCE FROM THE TEACHER looks more directly at the expectation that the teacher has in the classroom for each student and
how it is understood. Each of these themes will be further explained and used to develop an understanding of how a cohort of students describes their academic and social experiences at a juvenile detention center.

**Table 12. Interview Findings**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ACADEMIC SUCCESS</th>
<th>STUDENT SUPPORT TEAM ACCESS</th>
<th>INTELLIGENCE LEVEL</th>
<th>TEACHER ACADEMIC SUPPORT</th>
<th>ASSISTANCE FROM TEACHERS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sustainability</td>
<td>Availability in time of duress</td>
<td>Prior to arrival at the detention center</td>
<td>Making the work easier</td>
<td>Wait time</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perceptions</td>
<td>Recognition of growth with support</td>
<td>Upon exiting the program</td>
<td>Listening to academic concerns</td>
<td>Teacher expectations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>IEP or court mandated support</td>
<td></td>
<td>Relationship building</td>
<td>Work completion</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**ACADEMIC SUCCESS**

This theme refers to the perceptions the students have of their academic skills and how these perceptions and related feelings were not just unique to the detention center but, perhaps, extending beyond it as well. As someone that had had the opportunity to review the academic success of students at this center previously, I was interested in learning what they thought of themselves as a learner when they arrived, and how that perception had or had not changed during their placement. In reviewing the interview data, many of the students shared similar feelings to this student:
“I got all A’s in here, but then went to (local high school) and I failed again. It was depressing too cuz I was doing good and thought it would you know, carry me to do good at TC, but it didn’t.”

Another student summed up his feelings this way as he entered for the first time:

“I haven’t been successful in school, so I didn’t think it would change once I got here, and it didn’t really. I got good grades, but then when I left, it was like I was back to me again.”

For the student that had returned, I was able to review his grades in the document check and note that while he was enrolled at the detention center, his grades averaged out to a B average. Once the student returned to his base school, his grades dropped considerably, and he was failing each of his classes within one quarter (ten weeks) of reenrollment.

Sustainability, or lack thereof of academic success which was discussed at length by the students in almost each interview. Some of the students asked the question of why they could not achieve the same level of success that they had attained at detention, while others shared a frustration in what they were experiencing.

“I know when I go back, I won’t have a class with 6 kids in it. I’m not that kind of kid, so I mean, my classes will have 30 kids in it. It’s too bad that the people their (base school) don’t get to see what I can do. They think because I’m here, that I don’t know stuff. I was in honors math in middle school.”

This level of frustration regarding not only his perceptions of his education but that of others, was raised by other students as well.

“Here, it’s chill. If you don’t get something, there is like nobody here, so it is not bad to ask questions. I get stuff done here.

Another student shared:

“It’s frustrating man, I mean you in here and it sucks, and then you get good
grades, but it don’t matter. Ain’t nobody gonna hire me cuz I was locked up.”

This student, who had been in the facility previously, was thought of by his peers and teachers as a very positive student that would return to his school and succeed. His insights gave a new lens into the theory of the iceberg and its impression on those providing services to students. Did the view that this student would be successful, potentially blind the teachers and others in the facility from delving into his insecurities and concerns not only as he exits, but as he seeks employment? He later shared in response to the question, “Do you feel that the teachers here know how you feel about your future chances for success?”

“No, because why would I say this? Then they think you need special help and I ain’t that n----a.”

Yet another student shared that his frustration with his grades and academic success were not his fault. His thoughts were not shared by others in this way, but more than half did share that they felt that their academic success was out of their control.

“I haven’t been a good student in like ever. I was just not good at school, but nobody in my family is too.”

On the other side of these perceptions are those students who shared they do see there being an opportunity to continue their success. One student was extremely pleased at the progress he had made and saw the detention center as a place of immense support. He stated:

“When I got here, (Mr. Martin) I was lost. I was like failing everything and like didn’t go to school or nothing. Then I get here and all of a sudden things get better and like I still can’t read that good, but I can graduate now.”

Although his feelings of success were not matched by his grades, the recognition of his
own success is significant in enhancing his own self-image, as well as developing a genuine appreciation for his effort since his entry. It should also be noted that this student was not only being more successful academically, but was beginning to share concerns he had in his life with the counselor and developing strategies to address his anger management issues.

The perceptions of academic success shared by the students varied immensely. As noted in the previous remarks from a student, the thought that he would graduate was a significant boost to his morale and perhaps caused others in the facility to view him as a scholarly inmate. However, the majority of the students expressed their thoughts on how negatively others perceived their academic prowess. In response to such perceptions, the following observations are divided into two areas: first is the perceptions shared regarding how the detention staffs sees the students, while the second part captures the students’ perceptions of the instructional staff and site administration team. In completing this work, I perhaps underestimated the need for the students to feel “liked” by the detention staff assigned to them each day. This likeness was often built over time, or by being compliant, as one student shared:

“I get bad grades, but don’t bother nobody, so the DS’s (detention staffers) treat me good. I don’t get nothing, but they let me get away with not doing good at school.”

In my follow up conversation with this student, he relayed that the point he was making was that they thought he was not too bright, and because of this left him alone. When asked if this was a feeling he liked, he stated:

“I just want to leave, so if I have to be cool, I’ll do it. I hate this place.”
One student with an IEP shared that by having an IEP, he thought the detention staff would think he was not intelligent.

“I had that joint (IEP) since like 5th grade. I thought they (DS’s) knew, but they treat me like everyone else.”

When asked if they would or should treat him differently because of his IEP, he stated,

“They probably would think I’m not good at school. I mean I don’t like it because it’s boring, especially here.”

The thoughts of the students regarding their academic success varied greatly, but at the core of their reflections was an instability or uncertainty regarding their purpose for being in school, how it would support their life plans, and the overall negative thoughts many had regarding how adults would perceive them. Some of this perception was tied to their attendance at a juvenile detention school, while others maintained it was a deep seated issue that had been a part of their identity long before they arrived at the detention center.

**STUDENT SUPPORT TEAM ACCESS**

In the Jonesville City School District, each site is provided a team of personnel dedicated to the wellness of each child. This group of employees is known as the Student Support Team, or SST, as they are often referred to. The group consists of the school nurse, psychologist, counselor, and social worker. Working in concert with one another, the team provides both individual and group support to students and their families in the areas of counseling, mental and physical health, and also provides leadership and support with 504 Plans, IEP’s, and health plans.

The Jonesville Juvenile Detention Center does not have a traditional team like the other schools in the district. The team consists of a nurse and counselors from the various
jurisdictions that provide support to specific clients. Each of the counselors is on a rotating schedule, with some present for a portion of a day or a full day, but never two at the same time. Regardless of the jurisdiction the counselors represent, their responsibility is to provide support to any student making a request or who has been identified as needing assistance.

With the current system described above in place, it has been noted by the students that there were three areas of concern regarding the guidance and support they receive from this team. The first being that students with IEP’s who had counseling services mandated in their IEP’s do not always receive this support. Second, a group of those interviewed shared that the strategies being provided are not supporting them. Lastly, and of the most significance to the students, was that in times of duress the counseling support and medical assistance was not readily available.

The students that participated in the interviews to a person shared that the lack of availability of somebody to help them during times of frustration or anger, was unsettling. Said one student:

“I mean, I got put in here for beating somebody up. So, my PO (probation officer) says that I’m a get help for my anger. I don’t know what he mean. When I get mad, there ain’t nobody here at night, so you don’t get any help. You just stay mad.”

Another student expressed his displeasure this way:

“So, if you get mad during the day, there is somebody here. You go to the timeout or see the lady. But at night, there might not be nobody and then you just stuck.”

When I pressed each student on the lack of services, it became apparent that there were a number of reasons for the displeasure at work. For some, the idea of participating in
counseling implied that they were flawed, or that they had something wrong with them. Each was provided access to the counselor(s) and nurse, but a few were hesitant to meet with either in times of heightened anxiety because they did not want to be perceived as having something wrong with them mentally.

“I don’t go to the counselor lady or that man because what’s the point? Then people look at you crazy anyway and when people walk by they see you in there and think you got mental stuff with you.”

After asking the student if he would seek out the service if it was located in a more private location, he relented a little, but still said he was not willing to participate.

Another aspect of this finding is that historically African American men have been excluded from these services, whether intentionally by institutions or by the person who was to receive the service. Some of this ties to their parents perceptions about participating in counseling. One student shared:

“My mom said that I was not crazy, but lazy, and lazy people don’t need counseling. They need a job.”

Another student summed up his thoughts this way:

“Do I need help with stuff, yes. But when I get mad, I don’t want to walk all the way down the hall and sit with somebody and have them ask me about how I feel. How do you think I feel? I’m mad! Fix that. You want to know why I’m mad, huh? Probably not, because then you just gonna feel sorry for me.”

During this portion of the interviews, I found students to express a clear dislike for the counselors and the nurse, although the nurse was looked at a bit differently. Some of the participants see her for medication, almost exclusively in the morning, but for nothing else. Rarely did they interact with her regarding any other services. Only one student commented on her, sharing:
“She cool, but she is only here sometimes I think. So, if you get a cut or something, the DS’s help you out. I don’t know if she is here all the time.

One counseling concern was that students expressed a lack of identification in how the strategies being taught during counseling were actually helping them. The most significant and detailed explanation came from the youngest participant:

“I was told to go and get help with not getting mad. Why I can’t get mad? Do you ever get mad? I know you do. I’m getting mad with the stupid questions. But they tell me to breathe. I’m breathing now and I’m still mad, so it don’t even work.”

When I explained that yes he was breathing, but that there were specific aspects to the breathing technique that he needed to employ he said:

“I breathe everyday. I get mad every day. I’m not going to walk around with my hands out (lifts hands as if in a Christian church with his palms up and arms out at his sides, chest high).”

I tried to engage this student in further discussion, but it was evident that he was becoming more frustrated with this line of questioning, so I ceased and moved in another direction. However, another student expressed similar frustration regarding the success of the strategies he learned in counseling:

“First. I went to get help because I argue too much. Then it was to learn how to whisper because I have a loud voice. Then the white lady said that I need to work on my outbursts in class. Mr. Martin, you know me. I do argue but that is who I am. I speak loud because I’m black and I say stuff in class because I’m singing and stuff.”

I shared that I appreciated his insights, but still wanted to know what didn’t work for him. His reply was straight and to the point:

“None of it, because I don’t have a problem with any of it. Some of these people do, but I don’t so…”

There has to be a level of frustration attained not only by these students but by anyone
who participates in counseling and realizes that the suggestions being made, even when followed or acted upon, do not result in a positive outcome. This cohort of students also made suggestions about how best the counselors could ascertain whether the skills being taught were beneficial to the students:

Interviewer: You have shared that the counseling sessions and what was taught didn’t really help you much. What suggestion would you make to the counselors so that their work could help you?

Student: They should just ask if it is working and when I say “no,” don’t try to teach it to me again, but do something else.

Interviewer: You know, they might say it’s because you didn’t give the thing they taught enough time or enough of a chance to work.

Student: Let me say that if you give me work to do, and I don’t do it, you try to teach it again. If I say “no,” you stop, and ask me what is needed at this time for us both to be successful. They don’t do that. I don’t need to talk to nobody when I’m mad. I need time to let it out. You know what makes me happy, listening to music. You would be able to help so many kids if they just let us listen to music.

Interviewer: Is that a strategy or just a way to avoid the issue?

Student: It would make me happy, so I think it’s a strategy. When you drive in your car and you happy, you listen to music. It’s like that movie where the kid is in the country and they won’t let them listen to music (Footloose) and then they get to and have a good time.

Interviewer: So, they should listen to you guys more about how you think it is best to solve your own issues?

Student: Uh huh.

The last part of this theme involved only two students, but these statements required immediate action to be taken by the interviewer. Four of the student participants were students with IEP’s. Of the four, two had counseling services included in their IEP’s. This meant that the facility, unless it held an IEP meeting and made modifications to the IEP, would be responsible for providing counseling services to students. Both students shared that this did not occur consistently. One of the students, who had become quite
familiar with the contents of his IEP through this interview process, did not know he was supposed to receive counseling as a related service. He shared:

“So, when I meet with her, does she just ask questions about how I feel? I never got that here before. I don’t even know the people.”

The second student also stated that at his last school he was in a boys group that would meet in a circle and share their weekends and what they were dealing with at home. He spoke highly of the group and wished it or one like it existed at the detention center. He looked forward to going each week and so did some of the other kids. When informed that it might like different at the detention center, he said that he would still go because it was a good way to get “things out.”

Beyond the simple fact that the students were not able to access something that could potentially be a benefit to them, of greater significance is the clear violation of their rights under IDEA. Upon recognizing this discrepancy in services, I alerted the principal and they were able to convene IEP Team meetings for both students and provide compensatory services to each of them, including the onset of an on-going counseling program for both students. It is evident in the responses of the students that there are cases where the opportunity to participate in counseling or related services may not be seen as valuable to them, but it may be more significant to note the lack of perceived effectiveness of the supports being provided by those being instructed to use them.

INTELLIGENCE LEVEL

Students shared two clear distinctions between INTELLIGENCE LEVEL and ACADEMIC SUCCESS. One was that INTELLIGENCE LEVEL referred to the personal feeling of intelligence the student had upon entering compared to the
perceptions they believed others may have had of them. This definition was their own and showed a high degree of variance among the participants. For example, when one male student was asked to describe how he thought of intelligence, he shared that his level of intelligence was lower than the other students:

“I am not too smart at school, but I know other stuff. Stuff that I like.”

A student who receives special education services said:

“Since I have an IEP, I can’t be too smart, you know? I mean, they don’t give those to the smart kids.”

During the interview of one student, we were able to engage in a deeper discussion of intelligence and what he thought about himself.

Interviewer: Do you feel that you received the academic support that you needed? How did you know?
Student: I got a lot of help, and I needed it. I was not a good student when I was there and never was, so I liked the small classes and stuff.
Interviewer: So, did you always feel that you weren’t a good student, or did that come about at a certain age or grade?
Student: I was good when I was like at (name of local elementary school), but then I got to like 4th grade and everything got hard for me.
Interviewer: Why? What happened?
Student: Nothing happened at school I just moved and missed a lot of days. The new teacher that I had said that I had missed so much and that I was not going to pass my SOL’s (Standards of Learning assessments). Everybody made such a big deal about these and so I got all worked up and just kind of stopped doing my work. I failed the test.
Interviewer: What about all the ones since then. Have you passed any of them?
Student: No. Not one of them. I don’t even try. I passed all of them in 3rd grade though.
Interviewer: Do you just not try or are they too hard?
Student: I just don’t care. I mean what’s the big deal with these tests?
Interviewer: You have to pass six of them to graduate.
Student: Then I guess I ain’t graduating then. I should do the GED. Somebody said something about an applied diploma so I can do that too.

Interviewer: Did you know that you needed six to graduate?

Student: It don’t matter how many. It could be one, I am not going to pass.

The frustration regarding testing was not shared by this student alone. Others expressed their frustration about a test serving as the assessment of their intelligence, and many found themselves trapped by this standard. Some of these feelings came in asking questions about their career paths. Here is a brief conversation with one participant.

Interviewer: What are you looking to do once you get out of high school?

Student: I don’t know. I mean my parents want me to go to college, but I don’t want to. I just want to work. Maybe do something like that.

Interviewer: Where do you want to work?

Student: I don’t know. Some place with food, but I don’t want to be no bus guy with the dishes. I want to cook stuff and hang with the people.

Interviewer: Do you know anybody hiring?

Student: No. I got an application from Chipotle, but it’s hard to understand what they want me to do.

Interviewer: Well, you’ve been to Chipotle before. What do you think would be a good job for you there?

Student: No, I mean the application. I don’t really know what they saying to do. It’s just a lot of stuff.

In this instance, as well as the others presented, their perception of their intelligence was potentially limiting opportunities and access to schooling and employment. In addition to the feelings of inadequacy expressed by many upon entering, it did not change for many of the participants upon exiting the program. One said:

“When I left detention, wasn’t nothing different. I had better grades, but they weren’t like real grades.”

There was a feeling shared by many of the participants that the grades earned at
detention center school and the school program itself was not “a joke,” but not reflective of a “real school” either. Perhaps this was the reason for the following exchange with a participant:

Student: You know when I left, I was so happy. Then when I got to my school, it was like I was still in the same classes. I was behind because at detention you don’t do the stuff they (students at base school) do.

Interviewer: But did you feel any smarter when you got there? At your old school?

Student: For a little while, but then when they put me in the same classes I failed, so no.

This conversation was repeated throughout the interview process and demonstrated that overall the students felt a lack of intelligence upon entering and exiting, and that this was confirmed as they returned to their base school and in seeking post graduate opportunities.

TEACHER ACADEMIC SUPPORT

This theme was dedicated to the students’ perceptions of the ways in which teachers developed relationships with them, as well as their ability to recognize the learning styles of each student. Included in the learning styles recognition is the ability to incorporate the student and their lived experiences into the classroom. This theme also notes the ability of the teacher(s) to both build relationships and recognize the students’ learning, and then use this knowledge in delivering instruction.

The research regarding the ability of a teacher to build a relationship is well documented and will be substantiated in the comments shared by the participants. The forming of a bond that promotes growth, experimentation, and a sense of security are
revered by students and teachers across education, but I would argue that this is even
more difficult to create in this environment due to the limited time that the students
attend, combined with the trauma that the student may have endured prior to entering the
program. One student lamented:

“I was in for like a month the first time, and I didn’t leave my room. Then I
started to go to school and there was this one dude, he taught history and he
would sit with me and like just help me get the work done. Nobody had done that
before and we was cool. I think he liked when I was in there too because he didn’t
help nobody else.”

Aspects of this theme include two other areas as well. Students recognized that the
teacher’s ability to make work easier, “digestible,” as one student noted, is a significant
detail in this theme. Educators often call this scaffolding or depending on the
modification, differentiation. The students referred to it as “helping” or “making it so that
I can understand it.” The ability of a teacher to be able to do this is a tremendous skill,
and when it benefits the students and is recognized as a plus by them, it is a win for both
sides. This again is difficult to do with such a short turn-around time to work with the
students. As it relates to this theme, students referred to teachers by name and often did
so with a smile or recollection of a positive experience. One senior shared:

“Ms. Jones, man she could teach! She always knew how to make it just right so
that I could get it down quick and keep moving.” He continued by stating, “She
was just good at her stuff- like everybody should teach like her. I like the way she
made the stuff easier, but I didn’t feel like a retard too.”

One particular aspect of this part of the interview process, was how a few students
commented that this type of support had not been provided before. Regardless of the
reason, it caused a few to pause and reflect on what might have been had their instruction
been provided in this way.
“If I’m being honest, I get why my mom says I do better here. She don’t know how the teaching is done, but like the way is better. You just sit and they help you. I think that I could get good grades now.”

Another shared:

“When we started the classes, I thought it was like any other class. Then I saw everybody like sitting in groups and then I asked to be in one in English. Then I got the help and nobody laughed so I kept working. It was easy.”

As it relates to this work, the ability to form a bond with the students was important for one other reason. It allowed students to be able to discuss certain academic and sometimes personal matters that they may be dealing with. This opportunity to share is an interesting dynamic in a facility that looks for its staff to create positive bonds with students, but yet to keep the relationships at a level that promotes compliance. However, even under this unwritten system, the students interviewed shared examples of when the teachers forged relationships with them and allowed them to ask questions they may not have previously. The following example captures a detailed exchange between the interviewer and one student about the power of a positive relationship with one of the educators:

Interviewer: So, I’m trying to understand if you could ask questions to the teachers about your life.
Student: One of them, yes. I mean, I felt like I could ask him anything and he would give me an answer and sometimes it got him to not teach me anything.
Interviewer: So, did you like him because you learned you could waste time with him, or did you like what he had to say?
Student: Both. He was cool as f---k. I could just talk to him about anything.

Interviewer: Let me cut you off for a sec. What did you talk about?
Student: I mean, one day we talked about weed. We were watching the news and they talked about it being legal in DC. I was like, asking if it meant I could go and buy it, but he broke it down. You can’t just go to DC and buy a pound or nothing.
You have to have a reason.

Interviewer: Did you like that talk?

Student: In here they don’t let you talk about nothing so it was chill.

Interviewer: What else? Was there anyone else you could do this with?

Student: Wasn’t any other teachers, but we would just talk. It wasn’t nothing like you think. No illegal s—t. I mean it was straight. You don’t get that here unless you are trying to get something from the DS.

Interviewer: You mean like favors?

Student: Yes, Mr. Martin, like favors. You all think that everything is shady up in this b—h.

There were multiple examples of students sharing their comfort with educators, but one shared not his own story, but that of another student:

Interviewer: So, did you have a special bond, not like bad, with a teacher or a DS?

Student: Nah, but my boy J- did. He was cool, aint that what you say? (Laughs)

Interviewer: All right, stop laughing at me being old. So who was cool? J—or the teacher?

Student: The teacher. He would help him but he also like came to the Unit after school and would talk with him cuz his mom died and he was hurting. So, he found like a person to talk with and it helped him. When he got out he talked about him a lot. He said he would be locked up if it wasn’t for him.

Interviewer: That’s an amazing story. Do you have somebody that you can discuss things like that in your life? Outside?

Student: Just friends but you know we only know what we know. We young.

This story moved me and got me to ask if this bond could be forged with one, how come it could not be done with all? How intentional does the facility need to be in this work? In summary, I was moved emotionally as the students recalled the impact that some of the teachers had on their lives, both negatively, but more importantly, positively.

ASSISTANCE FROM TEACHERS

Perhaps the most black and white or yes/no responses, came from the line of
questioning around expectations and support from teachers. There was an equal split of students who described their understanding of the teachers’ expectations for them as “high” versus “low.” The recognition of how students determined the level of expectations were noted in two areas: wait time to respond to questions, and work completion.

A formal definition of work completion and wait time were not developed by the participants, but they knew it when they experienced it. One student, who noted that teachers have a high level of expectations for him, shared that his teachers keep telling him to not give up and will almost ignore him when he says that he cannot do the work.

“I used to get so mad, because like the other kids could sit back and chill and I had to get everything done all the time. I never got a break. But it was good though now because I know they was just challenging me. But I got all my credits now too, so…”

It is important to note that although this student recognized that the teachers had high expectations for him (as he defined it), he noted that others in the class did not experience this benefit. The following reflects the experience of a student who felt a low level of expectation:

“I just sat there. Sometimes they would wake me up and other times, just let me sit there. They would say stuff like what are we going to do with him, but I don’t think they really meant it that much because they didn’t do nothing.

When asked to elaborate on this, specifically how he knew this to be true, he referred back to being allowed to sleep in class. Other students shared his experience and even commented on fellow students who felt this way:

“I know they don’t care. I sit there the whole time and they ask me to do stuff but as long as you don’t bother them, they don’t say anything.”
Another student said:

“When I walk into the class, they say things like, oh here comes… When they do that I know they don’t think I’m a do any work, so I don’t.”

Yet one other student shared a peer’s experience:

“I just be cool in class and do what they say because I want to graduate from (HS). But he don’t do nothing and nobody says nothing. It makes me want to do nothing too but I keep trying.”

In regards to wait time, the responses were less clear. Some students noted statements or phrases said by teachers more than anything else. For example, one participant shared that he felt almost happy that they would answer all the questions for him:

“When you sit there long enough, they will just give you the answer. They get happy about it too, like you actually knew it.”

It was evident that the experiences of the students were driven, as in all buildings of education, not solely on the delivery of content, but the belief by the students that the educator actually cares about them. I was left with a series of questions following my time with the students, but as it related to this theme, I kept asking, when did the student become aware of the lowered or heightened expectations and what was the impact of that recognition on their current situation? In the following chapter I address this question, along with the implications for the implications and recommendations derived from the larger study.
CHAPTER 5: RECOMMENDATIONS FROM THE FINDINGS AND POLICY IMPLICATIONS

Summary and Discussion of Findings

Based on the interviews of the students, there are two recommendations that must be addressed to assist in the support of the students:

1. Transition plans for students need improvement prior to entering and then when exiting the program.

2. Students need to be provided with consistent access to extracurricular activities, especially when the school day has concluded, and also during the weekends. Additionally, the potential for a legal matter regarding counseling services must be addressed and a review and the development of a professional development series around cultural competency and culturally responsive pedagogy should take place immediately.

Development of Transition Plans

Each student upon appointment to the facility receives an orientation designed to address three areas of need:

1. Acclimate the student to the physical facility.

2. Provide the staff of both the detention center and school with an opportunity to gather information about the student from his perspective, and allow him to ask questions of both staff groups.

3. Identify areas of concern for both sides so that the implementation of a plan of some sort can be implemented without hesitation.

Since the focus of this study relates more to the school than the larger detention
center, it is important to understand the orientation process of this program. Prior to this study, the process consisted of a designated educator sitting with a student and completing an interest inventory in order to understand the likes and dislikes of the student, as well as their academic aspirations. Included in this document is demographic information, and a review of the rules and procedures of the detention center and school program. What this study demonstrates is the need for additional information to be incorporated into this process. A number of students shared how in their time at the facility they did not feel as though the teachers knew much about them. They specifically discussed a lack of understanding of the ways in which the school could assist students when they became angered, as well as what made them happy. One student shared the following:

“When it is going good, then everything is good. When I’m mad or something, I just feel like people don’t know what to do to help me.”

Students also shared that there was repetition in the questions in both orientations, and that they wondered how the information was used. It prompted one student to state:

“You all ask these questions, but then do you guys talk about us, or what do you do? I been telling people I live with my grandmother for years, and you all still ask about my mom and she ain’t been around for ever. I don’t even know when I saw her last.”

These questions prompted me to ask how we should incorporate a method of including a deeper understanding of their personalities in the orientation. Whether through the use of a personality assessment or a career and readiness questionnaire, the school must probe deeper to afford those providing services with some insight into the lives of the students being served in the program.
This information then needs to be shared with the staff members in a productive way. The challenge is determining exactly what information to share, and then figuring out how to ensure that the administration, educators, and students use it in a way that benefits the student and does not lead to harm. Currently, the process of sharing information regarding a student is relegated to that of their course load, or to place them in classes. Additionally, however, it is also sometimes used by some staff members to generate rumors and innuendo. These rumors almost always lead to a negative stigma associated with the student and subsequent actions of the staff that sometimes reflect a serious misrepresentation of the student. While it might be understandable how staff serving students with intense academic and social needs might draw stereotypical reactions and even feel some anxiety about serving them adequately, it is imperative that personal student information be used exclusively to better serve the students and not to harm them.

**Extracurricular activities at the facility for students**

As the interviews showed, there were minimal activities for the students once the school day had concluded. In a typical day, the students would return to their units at 3:00, be provided a snack soon thereafter, and then essentially remained in their units to play cards, watch television, and at times, participate in recreation in the gymnasium. In order to stimulate the students, I recommend that the afterschool program be developed further. The following is a list of recommendations for that development:

1. Design a schedule that incorporates wellness, academic, and social components for the students.

2. The wellness program would consist of physical fitness in the gymnasium, as
well as the opportunity to participate in fitness-based clubs or classes. These classes could be spinning (a bicycle program), an indoor running program, a “boot camp” like program to enhance overall fitness, and a health class to provide ongoing instruction to the students as they develop into adulthood. It should also be investigated whether community agencies could provide resources, such as a tae kwon do or yoga instructor, which could be used to offer classes in these areas.

3. An enhanced academic program would include the possibility for students to receive tutoring services in their areas of need, as well as enrichment for those requiring that level of challenge. Currently, the students have access to the Petey Greene tutoring program that comes in on Saturdays to assist students. The materials for this are prepared by teachers, and this practice should be completed each day for the students. My recommendation would be to create an individual file based on the academic levels of the students and provide this to the detention center staff to work with the students each evening. It would require that additional instructional guidance be provided to the detention staff, but would be a significant upgrade to the educational services currently in place.

4. Socially, the students need to be provided with organized opportunities to engage in discourse regarding their lives. Specifically, this should include both group and individual sessions. The group sessions or meetings should be done using a community circles format. Community circles are designed to bring communities together and in doing so promote a sense of security for its members. My aim in proposing this is to provide the students with a forum to share their lives and, in turn, create a new comradery
with one another. Both the individual and group sessions would be led by detention center staff, requiring additional training in how to lead the circles, and engage students in individual sessions.

5. The development and utilization of a tiered approach to student management is needed. Similar to an incentive-based program, the students must have a reason to strive for and attain academic and social success. This program would be similar to a positive behavior intervention program, with the goals being to recognize students for positive behavior and re-teach that which needs to be addressed.

Counseling services

Of the students that participated in this study, each was provided the opportunity to receive support related to wellness. This came in multiple forms: individual and group counseling regarding recognized areas of concern; probation officer meetings to discuss academic and social progress; medical support when needed, in particular for those that have daily medication needs; and counseling support provided to students outside of the facility for more extenuating services (i.e., suicide risk, infections, or long term illness). Each of these services is provided by qualified employees dedicated to providing the best guidance and access to resources that they can deliver. However, one significant area that must be addressed is the inconsistent direct counseling services provided to students with individualized education plans (IEP). The reasons for the inconsistency were many, but the most glaring were the lack of communication between the teachers assigned to manage the IEP’s and those providing the counseling services, and that the school program does not have a designated counselor. The solution to this is a complex one, but
Based on these findings, has been implemented; it must now continue to be implemented consistently. As students arrive to the facility, an orientation is done to acclimate him or her to the detention center and the school program. As part of this updated orientation, student transcripts and academic records are reviewed. Should a student have an IEP, the document is now reviewed by the special education teacher assigned to the student, along with the administrator. If it is found that a child has counseling services, the team now brings the local counseling support personnel to the meeting to discuss and coordinate the services to ensure compliance, but more importantly, to ensure that each student receives adequate counseling to develop the skills necessary to be successful in the program and beyond.

**Professional development of instructional staff related to culturally responsive instruction**

Based on student responses, one area that needs to be enhanced for both the teaching and detention staff is their knowledge and utilization of culturally responsive teaching. As stated previously, one goal of this work is to incorporate the lives of the students into the classroom. This was noted in student reflections of activities like the Annual Poetry Slam and Hispanic/Latino Heritage Country presentations. Unfortunately, these activities were inconsistent and completed in isolation. There was little if any evidence shared by students of the consistent use of culturally responsive pedagogy in instruction and even less provided by the detention staff. The students shared that this was evident in the teaching staff not asking questions or inquiring about the day-to-day lives of the students.

“They (teachers) never wanted to know what I thought about stuff. They just kind of did what all the teachers do.” Another student shared that he really enjoyed baseball
and that while at his other school, the teacher taught physics, almost exclusively through baseball. He shared,” It would have been nice if maybe they asked me how I can learn stuff. I’m not dumb.”

By recognizing the strengths and attributes that the students bring into the classroom, perhaps their outlooks on the future, of themselves, and the overall climate of the facility would change. This would be a significant change for the staff of the center, as the majority of their professional learning focuses on specific content work (instructional pacing guides, preparation for end of the year assessments, and various instructional initiatives). Yet, what was shared by the students can no longer be ignored. The staff has to engage the students on a different level than previously employed, and this should be done through the use of culturally responsive teaching.

**Professional Evolution of the Researcher**

I understood that as I began this work my findings had the potential to change the views that I had regarding education, and that has happened significantly. I had always shared in my philosophy of education that the focus of a quality education was based on the research and understanding of equitable practices that would be provided to students, as well as access to and opportunity for such practices being provided to *all* students.

What quickly became apparent in this research was that missing from the academic lives of the students interviewed was the intentionality of these actions; that is, there was not intentional action being taken systematically to ensure that the students were receiving the education they deserve.

For the past decade, I have dedicated my work to ensuring that educational equity was at the forefront of my work. Whether I was working with students, teachers, or families,
the focus of my work was grounded in the ideals of a democratic society only being as strong as those deemed or relegated to the proverbial “bottom rung of society.” I would stress that action needed to be taken, and cite my influences and essentially engage in highbrow dialogue, but with minimal action ever taking place. For example, in a previous position, I was responsible for the diversity initiative in the school district. As I visited schools and discussed strategies that could be used in closing the achievement gap, or addressing disproportionality in disciplinary practices, the follow through by the school or administration, may or may not have taken place. It caused me a level of frustration, and now in conjunction with this work, has forced me to include urgency and fidelity of implementation into what I do.

This work has almost forced me to develop a new lens regarding advocacy. The group of students in this study is not recognized as valuable to the field of education, or at best is lumped together as a group that professionals view as “those kids.” I know alone that I cannot provide the level of advocacy that I want to, but have begun to inform people of the stories of these students, participated in legislative discussions regarding juvenile justice, and provided professional development on a local and national level on the lives of the students in the study. Moving forward, I look to continue this work, and I am in the process of developing a blog to share the work being done to support students in juvenile justice facilities across the country.

**Future Research**

This study provided insights into the educational experiences of a cohort of African-American male students in a juvenile justice facility. Future research should be conducted
on this population to gain additional insights into their experiences in school.

Although this study was dedicated to African American males, another cohort of students at this facility are those in the Office of Refugee Resettlement Program. These students, as noted earlier in this dissertation, are provided academic and social supports due to their designation as a refugee. There is a significant level of oversight of the program by the Federal government, but as it relates to the services provided at the facility, it would be beneficial to learn the level of effectiveness of the program.

The focus of this work was on the academic and social supports in the juvenile detention school, but a modification of the interview process could be used to develop case studies of the students to be used in professional development of educators and detention staff. These case studies of the students could also be shared with the school systems from which these students attend, and be used to recommend academic and social services designed to support them as well as to suggest budget modifications to ensure equitable resources are provided as well.
APPENDIX

VOICES UNHEARD: HOW AFRICAN-AMERICAN MALES AT A JUVENILE JUSTICE SCHOOL NARRATE THEIR EXPERIENCE

Interview Protocol

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**Student Participant Interview Protocol:**

The focus of this interview is to have the participant share briefly about their educational background and experiences, and then move into their specific experiences at NVJDC. These interviews will be conducted at the facility, and completed over a three week period with 7 participants.

**Interview Script:**

Good afternoon. Thank you for agreeing to participate in this interview today. The purpose of this session is to learn more about you, your experiences at NVJDC, and then to use it to assist in enhancing the educational and social program here at NVJDC.

Interview Protocol:

1). To get us started, can you share what was the greatest day in the life of (say student’s name)? For this and the following questions, I will follow up with clarifying prompts.

2). What is your average day like at NVJDC?

3). Share with me a good day and a bad day since you have been here?

4). What are your thoughts on this school?

5). What is working well for you here? Not so well?

6). What are you hoping to get out of this school?

7). When you were assigned to attend NVJDC, what were your initial thoughts? Have they changed since then and if so, how?

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8). Do you receive the support that you need from the teachers at NVJDC? Share how you know this.

9). Do you feel that you have sufficient resources (pencils, paper, books, etc.) to be successful at NVJDC? Why do you feel that way?

10). If you could select three areas that the school could improve in as it relates to academics, what would those be?

11). Do you feel that NVJDC manages student discipline well? Ask for support of the students answer.

12). Do you feel a part of a family at NVJDC? Please explain your answer.

13). Have you had any interaction with the social worker, psychologist, or counselor? If so, was it helpful?

14). Would you recommend that other students work with these people (social worker, counselor, psychologist, etc.)?

15). If you could design what NVJDC should be for students, what would it look like?

16). What types of teachers would you suggest there be at NVJDC?

17). What can the staff do to make NVJDC better overall?

This concludes the interview protocol for the students. In an effort to ensure that the questions correspond to one of the three research questions, the table below provides an explanation as to how each are aligned.
Thank you for your willingness to participate in the research study entitled *Voices Unheard: How African American Males at a Juvenile Justice School Narrate Their Experience*. The purpose of my study is to improve the teaching and social opportunities for the students at the Northern Virginia Juvenile Detention Center. It will also let you and other students share your academic stories, and give educators ideas on how to design alternative education programs based on disciplinary action for students.

In order to participate, each student will need to acknowledge the following prior to the interview process:

1. Your participation in this research is strictly voluntary. At any time, you may choose to discontinue with the process.

2. Participation in this study will not be used to modify your placement, enhance or reduce your academic achievement, or provide you with an unfair advantage over students that select not to participate.

3. All information shared will be confidential. I, as the researcher, am the only person with access to the information that you share, and your name will not be used in any way in the findings of the research.

4. There are a small number of students that will be interviewed for this study, so there is a chance that what you share will or could be recognized by somebody reading the final study.

5. If at any time you feel uncomfortable about something that has been shared, you can have support from the social worker, psychologist, nurse, or counselor from the detention center.
6. In order for to participate, my parent or guardian must agree that it is acceptable for me to participate.

7. Illegal activity, and or any misconduct during the research study may be reported to the appropriate authorities.

Your participation will include the following:

1. An in-person interview for approximately 75-90 minutes. During this interview, I will ask a series of questions about how your academic and social experience at the detention center has been.

2. A 5 to 15 minute follow-up conversation may be added if deemed necessary after the interview. This is to ensure that if I have any questions about a response, I could speak again with the student and be clear about what was shared. Your identity will be protected from the possibility of identification by using a pseudonym for your name, and the interviews will be conducted privately, in an isolated room with just you and I after the school day concluded. During the interview process, the responses will be recorded and transcribed onto my personal computer which is password protected; thus, only I will have access to the information you share.

3. A list of the interview questions can be provided in advance upon request. The total time of participation will be approximately 2 hours.

4. At the conclusion of the study, all materials from it, including transcripts and individual student information, will be destroyed.

I agree to these conditions and understand my role in this research project. If at any time, I have questions regarding this study, I may contact Mr. Martin for clarity.

Participant Signature ____________________________________

Printed name ________________________________

Date ________________________________
Dear Parent or Guardian,

I am conducting a dissertation study currently entitled *Voices Unheard: How African American Males at a Juvenile Justice School Narrate Their Experience*. The study will help me complete my requirements for the Doctor of Education Leadership degree at the University of Pennsylvania. I invite you to participate in this study and would greatly appreciate your contribution to this very important research project.

The purpose of my study is to enhance the instructional and social opportunities for the students in attendance at the Northern Virginia Juvenile Detention Center. The study will provide a way for students to share their academic journey while they are in the detention center. Such sharing can help the education field determine how best to provide future students with the educational and social supports they need while they are in detention.

Your child’s participation would include the following:

1. An in-person interview for approximately 75-90 minutes. During this interview, he will be asked a series of questions about his academic and social experiences at the detention center. The purpose of the interview is to learn as much as possible about what students like about their learning experiences and ideas they have for making things better. The interview will also explore how their social experiences have played a role in their time at the detention center.
2. A 5 to 15 minute follow-up conversation may be added shortly after the interview to help clarify anything that was unclear. Your child’s identity will be protected from the possibility of identification by using a code name or pseudonym for his name, and the interviews will be conducted privately, with just the student and me after the school day has concluded. During the interview process, the responses will be recorded and typed into my personal computer which is password protected; thus, only I will have access to the information shared by your student.

3. A list of the interview questions can be provided in advance upon request. The total time of participation for your child will be approximately 2 hours.

4. At the conclusion of the study, all materials from it, including typed transcripts and individual student information, will be destroyed.

Your child’s participation in this research is strictly voluntary. At any time, your son or you may select to discontinue with the process. Participation in this study will not be used to modify the placement status of your child, enhance or reduce their academic achievement, or provide him with an unfair advantage over students that select not to participate. There is not financial compensation for participating. Participation in this study has very little risk to your son. The risks of participating are that your son may share information or recall an incident that caused him pain or emotional distress. If he shares that he would like to speak with a member of the support staff of the detention center (counselor, social worker, psychologist, or nurse), that will be offered during and after the interview. Additionally, any illegal activity and or misconduct during the research study process may be reported to the appropriate authorities. Lastly, you should know that the information shared by your student may be made public, and that due to the small number of participants, may be recognized by a reader of the final research study. The benefits of participating in this study are that the information shared from your son could serve as a guide in improving the stay of others at the detention center in the future.
If you would like to participate, please sign below.

Participant (student) Signature __________________________________
Printed name ________________________________________________

Parent/ Guardian Signature _____________________________________
Printed name ________________________________________________
Date _______________________________________________________

I greatly appreciate your giving time to this study, which will help inform the next generation of leaders in their efforts to address these very important issues.

Should you have any questions regarding this research or research participant rights, please contact the supervisor of this study:

Dr. Michael Nakkula
Chairperson, Human Development and Quantitative Methods Division
Graduate School of Education
University of Pennsylvania
Phone: 215-898-5195
References


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