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HIGH SCHOOL COUNSELORS AS SOCIAL CAPITAL IN A CAREER ACADEMY HIGH SCHOOL MODEL FOR LOW-INCOME STUDENTS: A CASE STUDY

BY

Onyejindu C. Oleka

A dissertation submitted to the faculty of

Bellarmine University

In partial requirement for the fulfillments of the degree

Doctor of Philosophy

February 2020

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High School Counselors as Social Capital in a Career Academy High School Model for Low-Income Students: A Case Study

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This doctoral journey started on September 9th, 2016. That was our first weekend of classes. I missed that first weekend, though, because that weekend another journey started: my marriage. Thank you, Jamie. You have been my most ardent supporter, trusted confidant, solid rock, listening ear, and closest family. Quite literally, there has not been a day in our marriage where this doctorate was not there with us. Thank you for believing that I could do this.

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Dedication

I dedicate this to my dad, Dr. Samuel Oleka, who could not see this process start or finish. He went to heaven before it began, but my last conversation with him was letting him know I got into this program. Thank you, Dr. Oleka, for paving the way. My road to this point was so much smoother because of it.

Abstract

This qualitative study explored the idea that high school counselors, acting as a form of social capital, could influence the postsecondary opportunities of low socioeconomic students. This study used case study design to analyze freshman academy counselors and their influence in the career pathway selection process to answer two research questions: 1) Using the knowledge available regarding college and career opportunities, how do freshman academy counselors influence low socioeconomic students' career pathway selections? and 2) How do freshman academy counselors' perceptions of college and career opportunities for low socioeconomic students influence low socioeconomic students' career pathway selections? This study uses social capital theory, and the career academy rubric and theory of change from an urban school district as the theoretical framework. This study closes with a discussion of the findings and the implications of practice and future research.

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Chapter One: Introduction

Low socioeconomic students are graduating from college at rates five times less than their high-income peers, and only 52% of low socioeconomic high school students enroll in college as compared to 82% of their high-income peers (Deslonde & Becerra, 2018). Some recent projections suggest that nearly two-thirds of U.S. jobs will require postsecondary education in some way, and roughly 90% of job growth from growing industries with middle-class wages and higher will require some higher education training (Evan, Burden, Gheen, & Smerdon, 2013). Evan et al. (2013) goes on to state that lower socioeconomic students face an education and employment gap greater than their higher income peers. Cooper and Mulvey (2015) explain that an education beyond high school is a new phenomenon, as jobs in the 20th century did not demand the same level of skill and education that 21st century jobs require and "as we demand more sophisticated skills for the world of work, those without an education will suffer the consequences" (p. 660). Employment prospects, however, is not the only gap low socioeconomic students without college and career opportunities face compared to their peers.

Statement of the Problem

Woessman (2016) explains how an increased education can positively impact not only the job opportunities but the financial well-being of individuals noting, "if a more educated person contributes a larger marginal product to the production process of a firm, in a market economy the firm will pay the person higher earnings accordingly" (p. 4). Woessman continues that the skill developed through that education must be usable in an economic system in order to earn a higher wage. If the marginal productivity gained from the skill does not exceed the marginal cost of employing that individual, they will remain unemployed. According to Woessman, a lack of educational opportunity and financial gain is not only a loss for the

individual, but a detriment to society because “investing in people’s education and skills can thus ultimately help to avoid poverty, reduce social exclusion, and reduce inequality in society” (p. 5). Cooper and Mulvey (2015) concur with this analysis, explaining that poverty and a lack of wealth opportunities have a negative effect on quality of life indicators ranging from health, housing, environment, and stress:

> Children raised in these low-income families tend to suffer the consequences of poor nutrition, environmental pollution, familial stress factors, and poor-quality education. Lower cognitive functioning due to impoverished conditions can reduce learning, and thus, in the long term, lead to fewer employment opportunities and lower quality health care. (p. 660)

Access to college and career opportunities can lead to financial gains, which can lead to better life outcomes. Low socioeconomic students who do not have access to the same educational opportunities as their higher income peers could live a lower quality of life than those who do have access to those opportunities (Cooper & Mulvey, 2015; Woessman, 2016). High school counselors, however, can play a role in closing this gap between low socioeconomic students and their peers with regard to college and career opportunities.

High school counselors interact with students when students make college and career decisions, and for low-income students, these interactions can be significant for decision-making (Belasco, 2013). Specifically, Belasco (2013) suggests that high school counselors are important for low socioeconomic students and their post high school choices, particularly as it relates to college access. This is further supported by Perna (2006) in layer two of her conceptual model on student college choice, which explains how high school staff, namely teachers and counselors, play an important role in how students make decisions on what to do after high school:

> The percentage of students whose educational aspirations matched their occupational aspirations was higher in high schools that assisted students with planning their high school curricular choices, urged students to consider their career aspirations when making high school curricular choices, and ensured the availability of high school staff who were knowledgeable about curricular requirements and paths. (p. 141)

Still, only having college and career knowledgeable high school counselors and staff in the building may not be enough for students who need their support the most. Low socioeconomic students often struggle building trusting relationships with counselors at school, which can be harmful when making college choice decisions and potentially contribute to the problem of college access inequity between them and their high-income peers (Stanton-Salazar, 1997). Additional issues for low socioeconomic students regarding college access opportunities include the restrictive nature of how high schools are designed, namely "the bureaucratic processes, the dual role of teachers and counselors as mentors and gatekeepers, and the short-term duration of interactions" (Perna, 2006, p. 118). Given the existing gap between low socioeconomic students and their peers regarding college and career opportunities, further explorations on how to best serve high school low socioeconomic students on career opportunities are warranted.

Purpose of this Study

The purpose of this study is to learn and explain how high school counselors, operating within a high school career academy model in an urban school district, influence college and career opportunities for their low socioeconomic students. A high school career academy model is a high school learning model that must have a small learning community, a curriculum that prepares students for college through a career focus, and an advisory group responsible for building relationships with businesses, community members, and higher education institutions

(The National Career Academy Coalition, 2013). For example, in 2017, Jefferson County Public Schools (JCPS) developed a career academy model for the school district. JCPS models their career academies on the Ford Next Generation Learning Program (Jefferson County Public Schools, 2017a), which outlines some challenges to be addressed using a career academy model. One of those challenges is increasing “youth from families with low socioeconomic status (SES), and members of other underrepresented groups in career pathways/concentrations that will lead to highly paid careers” (Kantrov, 2017, p. 3). JCPS (2017a) states that its students in career academies will align “education and workforce development needs to better prepare students for postsecondary and career success” (para. 2), making implementation of this new program critical.

The career academy model seeks to directly address the established problem that college and career outcome gaps exist between low socioeconomic students and their peers. It does so by attempting to advance low socioeconomic students through career pathways. A career pathway is a set of courses offered specifically for students to prepare for careers (Jefferson County Public Schools, 2017b). The model places students in a freshman academy after middle school; those students then take a seminar their first year to determine what career pathway to choose, making their choices in the early spring (Jefferson County Public Schools, 2017b). The career academy model is run by the freshmen administrators, which includes the freshman counselor. In JCPS (2018a), for example, the high school counselor serves as an administrator who “improves student achievement and enhances the academic, career, and personal/social development of all students” (para. 1). Based on this structure, the freshman academy counselors are tasked with college and career exposure and play a significant role in determining the career pathway for their students, making them a key factor in how their low socioeconomic students make college

and career decisions. This leads to a set of research questions helpful to understanding the problem identified within this study.

Research Questions

The research questions this study seeks to explore include:

1) Using the knowledge available regarding college and career opportunities, how do freshman academy counselors influence low socioeconomic students' career pathway selections?
2) How do freshman academy counselors' perceptions of college and career opportunities for low socioeconomic students influence low socioeconomic students' career pathway selections?

Significance of the Study

Chapman (1981) explained that students make postsecondary collegiate decisions largely based on two broad categories: student characteristics and external influences. Student characteristics focus on academic aptitude and socioeconomic status. External influences are divided into three groupings, which are significant persons, institutional characteristics, and the attempts of those institutions to reach out to the student. High school counselors fit into the significant persons section (Chapman, 1981). Robinson and Rofka (2016) noted that students who are low in social capital are at a significant disadvantage when it comes to college opportunities. This is often the case for low socioeconomic students, who do not have as many familial ties to college opportunities, resources, and knowledge as their high-income peers (Deslonde & Becerra, 2018).

A resource like social capital, especially when concerning educational opportunities, often comes from parents and families, especially parents who are themselves college educated

(Bryan, Moore-Thomas, Day-Vines, & Holcomb-McCoy, 2011). Social capital is often described as the action of utilizing social relationships as an investment and earning societal benefits because of how society accepts those relationships and what they can offer (Lin, 1999). McDonough (1997) explained that high school counselors can potentially make up a gap in social capital for low socioeconomic students, increasing the potential for these students to attend college. This highlights the importance of well-informed, highly knowledgeable high school counselors, as they can help supplement the social capital that low socioeconomic students may be missing. Robinson and Rofka (2016) illuminated the weight of counselors, showing that meeting with a high school counselor consistently can increase the likelihood of applying to a four-year college by 93%, even when controlling for other institutional and informational sources. This is important when considering the context of low socioeconomic students, who otherwise are significantly less likely to seek out the resources and knowledge themselves to become college ready (Robinson & Rofka, 2016).

High school counselors are also important for non-college postsecondary opportunities (Deslonde & Becerra, 2018). Counselors are important for all postsecondary opportunities because they are often the keepers of information on career opportunities (Christian, Lawrence, & Dampman, 2015). They also build relationships with parents, who can help influence students' decision-making (Paolini, 2019).

This study is significant because the findings can inform how urban school districts can professionally develop existing counselors to ensure they are well-informed, highly knowledgeable, and equipped to properly engage their low socioeconomic students with regard to college and career opportunities. It can also provide the district with the data necessary to hire additional counselors who are best positioned to provide equitable college and career

opportunities for their low socioeconomic students. Additionally, this study is significant because it creates the opportunity to highlight the inherent social good within higher education. Cooper and Mulvey (2015) concluded education is intertwined within societal progress:

> Education can be both cause and effect. Indeed, it can be a central change agent in reducing poverty and in increasing well-being and economic opportunity. The link between quality education and economic prosperity, healthy living, and social mobility is well documented. (p. 662)

Higher education, in particular, creates an opportunity for higher lifetime income earnings for those who obtain at least some college compared to those who have no college degree at all (Webber, 2018), suggesting higher education is a net positive for society. Finally, the findings in this study could help provide policy or administrative recommendations to potentially end any structural barriers to low socioeconomic students accessing postsecondary opportunities. In order to provide the depth of analysis necessary to produce findings useful enough to ensure the significance of this study, a theoretical framework is key to use in conducting the research.

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework for this study is Lin's (1999) theory of social capital, viewed in the lens of the JCPS rubric for freshman academies and the JCPS freshman academy theory of action (Jefferson County Public Schools, 2018c; Jefferson County Public Schools, 2018d), which were built from the National Career Academy Coalition (NCAC) career academy standards (National Career Academy Coalition, 2018). The JCPS lens is used because JCPS directly mentions high school counselors in their freshman career academy rubric for success, expressly stating that an effective counselor is committed to the freshman and in the same physical location as the academy (Jefferson County Public Schools, 2018c), meaning there must be a one-to-one

ratio between counselors and freshman academies. Lin (1999) explained that social capital is "an investment in social relations with expected returns" (p. 30). This is a derivation of the concept of capital, which Lin describes as "part of the surplus value" (p. 28) kept by those who have control over systems of production. Within the JCPS freshman academy model, freshman counselors are agents of social capital. This framework will help provide the structure from which to analyze how urban career academy high school counselors influence low socioeconomic students with regard to postsecondary decisions.

Summary of Methodology

This study uses qualitative methodology because it allows for an in-depth description of the data collected to better understand the meaning people construct within their own experiences (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). The research design for this study is case study, a qualitative method where the investigator analyzes at least one bounded system over time through detailed, rich data collection involving multiple information sources such as documents, interviews, or observations (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The bounded system for this study is freshman academy counselors in majority free and reduced lunch (F/RL) high schools in District One, an urban school district in the southern part of the United States. Since this study is focused explicitly on how high school counselors influence low-socioeconomic student career choices, I argued gathering data through interviews, observations, and documents from District One's freshman counselors would provide an opportunity for rich analysis. To analyze the data, I used open coding to create categories based on the transcribed data. I then used those categories to create themes, which were used to articulate the findings.

Definition of Key Terms

There are several key terms that will be used throughout this study, some of which are to be considered interchangeable.

Postsecondary, and college and career. In Kentucky, the term "postsecondary" is meant to include any degree or certificate granting opportunity beyond high school that is considered to be a part of the higher education system (Kentucky Council on Postsecondary Education, 2016). This includes workforce certificates, community college certifications, associate degrees, bachelor's degrees, master's degrees, professional degrees, and doctoral degrees. Throughout this study, unless explicitly cited in research, the phrases "postsecondary," "college and career," and "career and college" are used interchangeably. This is because the findings will be produced within the context of Kentucky-specific postsecondary opportunities and definitions.

Counselors. Because the study is focusing on high school counselors, unless explicitly stated, "counselors" refers to high school counselors in general.

Freshman academy counselor. District One had counselors that explicitly worked in high schools that used a career academy model. The counselors in career academy high schools who worked exclusively with freshman were called freshman academy counselors. Whenever this term is used in this study, it is referring to those counselors specifically.

Academy counselor. This term refers to counselors who worked in District One in a career academy high school who worked with a non-freshman level student.

Academy coach. In District One, some high schools hired additional staff to support freshman academy counselors and academy counselors to deliver the freshman seminar. Those roles are called academy coaches.

Low-income, low socioeconomic, and free and reduced lunch. Often, free and reduced lunch designation is used as a proxy for students who are considered low socioeconomic students (National Center for Education Statistics, 2015). Similarly, the literature often used the terms "low-income" and "low socioeconomic" to refer to the same population of students. Therefore, unless explicitly defined within the literature review, the terms "low-income" and "low socioeconomic" are used interchangeably.

Social capital. Social capital is used throughout this study and is defined by many scholars (e.g., see Bryan et al., 2011; A. B. Cox, 2016; Hallett & Venegas, 2011; Holland, 2015; Holland & Farmer-Hinton, 2009; Murillo et al., 2017; Relles, 2017). Lin (1999) acknowledged this, stating that many researchers have contributed scholarship towards the discussion regarding social capital. Unless explicitly stated within this study, the term "social capital" refers to Lin's definition, which Lin (1999) explained as "an investment in social relations with expected returns" (p. 30).

Chapter Two: Literature Review

This literature review provides an analysis of studies that discuss postsecondary opportunity and access for low-socioeconomic students, as well as how high school counselors play a role in postsecondary opportunities for students. The literature reviewed also discusses the career academy model in high schools. The topics covered in this literature review are: 1) challenges facing low socioeconomic students in under resourced schools, 2) the high school counselor role, and 3) the career academy model in high schools. These topics are the focus of this review because a deep understanding of each is important in addressing the established problem in this research, which is the issue of low socioeconomic students' inequitable access to college and career options.

In this review, the methods used to search the literature include the Bellarmine University Library's online search tool and the reference pages of the articles reviewed. Keywords and phrases for the search included low socioeconomic students, postsecondary, college choice, high school counselors, and career academies. The articles reviewed came from the last 10 years to include a broad view of the key researchers in the field. Any works prior to the last 10 years were only included because they were identified by current researchers as foundational to the field.

Educational Equity Challenges for Low Socioeconomic Students

There were four themes as a result of the research on educational equity challenges for low socioeconomic students. The themes are: 1) structural inequity, 2) low socioeconomic value, knowledge, and capital, 3) student-focused college preparation and support, and 4) classroom-specific challenges.

The theme of structural inequity focuses on the topics of low socioeconomic students being systemically locked out of opportunities, facing non-academic barriers, and growing gaps among educational outcomes between low socioeconomic students and their peers. The theme of low socioeconomic value, knowledge, and capital reviews insights on the socio-institutional value and knowledge available to low-income students, as well as their access to social capital. The theme of student-focused college preparation and support reviews the topics of systemic incentives, the importance of additional support for low socioeconomic students, and how a college going culture in a high school can influence student outcomes. Finally, the theme of classroom-specific challenges discusses the teacher quality for low socioeconomic students and additional academic barriers.

Structural inequity. Structural inequity in the education system is an aspect of the written literature on the topic of educational challenges for low socioeconomic students. There are insights as to how this inequity may manifest itself at a systems level for many schools, school districts, or low-income communities. Many students can be systemically locked out of opportunities because they do not have access to them in their place of instructional learning.

Systemic lockout. Roughly one out of every eleven low-income students are likely to receive a college degree (Berliner, 2013). One reason for this is that low-income students who attend schools that serve a high number of low-income students often do not get full educational options, particularly when it comes to high rigor academic courses (Klugman, 2013). This lack of access to rigorous courses can have a profound impact on long-term academic success, particularly for students of Color who also live in poverty. Students in high minority, high poverty schools are less likely to attend high-performing colleges and universities, and high poverty high schools are less likely to even have students academically qualified to attend

(Welton & Williams, 2015). This low level of academic achievement is often not due to academic ability, but rather a lack of opportunity due to a systemic imbalance of resources.

Resources, such as time and content knowledge, play a role in low-income students' lack of academic achievement (Marchetti, Wilson, & Dunham, 2016). According to Bettinger, Long, Oreopoulos, and Sanbonmatsu (2012), this can be applied within the college going process as well, particularly with regard to the financial aid system. Bettinger et al. explained that the federal financial aid system is difficult to navigate and "researchers and policy makers have suggested that its complexity and inconvenience deters many from accessing higher education and contributes to the enrollment gap between high- and low-income students" (p.1), ultimately impacting where some low-income students choose to attend college. The misunderstanding of both the process and cost of college discourage low-income students from applying to more selective colleges that they may be academically qualified for because they overestimate the cost by as much as 300% (Bettinger et al., 2012). This contributes to a systemic lockout, because a high number of qualified low-income students "often succeed academically and graduate at high rates" (Bastedo & Bowman, 2017, p. 67) from highly selective colleges when they attend, yet they do not apply because of financial challenges. Instead, many qualified low-income students are choosing to enroll at a two-year college rather than apply to more selective institutions (R. D. Cox, 2016).

The phenomenon of low socioeconomic students not applying to selective colleges is the case even when early academic interventions are in place, as up to 70% of low-income and other underrepresented students who get into a more selective college due to early interventions enroll at a less selective college anyway, if they even enroll at all (R. D. Cox, 2016). R. D. Cox (2016) made this reality even more plain regarding academic interventions as a guarantee for college

opportunity for low-income students, stating, “empirical evidence challenges this notion altogether. For instance, interventions aimed at providing low income, Black, and Latino high school students with intensive academic preparation and improved ‘information’ (or social capital resources) do not ensure college enrollment” (p. 5).

While academic intervention, such as “robust college-preparatory curriculum” (R. D. Cox, 2016, p. 3), is an important tool for better outcomes for low-income students, this alone does not take into account the contextual complexities high poverty schools face with regard to resources and lack of institutional structures (Welton & Williams, 2015). Academic intervention could change student prospects, though, if those interventions were linked together into a system of school and community resources, leaders, and institutions that was designed to support low socioeconomic students (Murillo, Quartz, & Del Razo, 2017; Stanton-Salazar, 2010).

Stanton-Salazar (2010) contended that every child, regardless of background, benefits from a strong relationship with leaders and agents of varying institutions from many sociocultural backgrounds dispersed throughout their community and society. Resources, however, do not exist in a vacuum, and they are just as embedded in a social stratification system as anything else. Murillo et al. (2017) explained how this is a potential danger for low-income students:

> A significant number of low-income students of [C]olor attend segregated, underperforming, and underresourced schools with little college-going support. Without access to adequate counseling and support services, low-income and minority youth are less likely to complete the college application and enrollment process. (p. 239)

For low-income students, developing relationships with institutional agents of all backgrounds within their schools and communities could have a positive impact on their long-term

educational outcomes. Stanton-Salazar (2010) defined an institutional agent as

> An individual who occupies one or more hierarchical positions of relatively high-status and authority. Such an individual, situated in an adolescent's social network, manifests his or her potential role as an institutional agent, when, on behalf of the adolescent, he or she acts to directly transmit, or negotiate the transmission of, highly valued resources (e.g., high school course requirements for admission to 4-year universities). (p. 1067)

An institutional agent has significant status and power within an institution or organization (Stanton-Salazar, 2010), including high schools. Institutional agents in high schools, based on Stanton-Salazar's definition, could be principals, teachers, or counselors. These relationships could mitigate some of the systemic and non-academic barriers that low-income students deal with that create educational equity challenges.

Non-academic barriers. Institutional agents can play a role in low socioeconomic student educational outcomes but attempting to do so without acknowledging non-academic barriers could make for a more difficult endeavor. Kraft, Papay, Johnson, Charner-Laird, Ng, and Reinhorn (2015) explained that most principals and teachers recognized their schools as an open organizational system, meaning they alone cannot resolve the challenges that students face due to the environmental factors that impact student success. Relles (2017) exposed how low-income students deal with non-academic challenges in writing assignments while in high school, stating how some students mentioned they started writing after everyone else was asleep. Relles concluded that "abridgements to planning, drafting, and revising may have been motivated by competing temporal demands as opposed to low institutional standards" (p. 291). One of these competing demands could be encouragement at home. Marchetti et al. (2016) explained that low-income students are not always provided with the motivation from home to succeed at school,

and some low-income parents expect their children to do only as well as they did, and "often, low income earners did not do well in school. Consequently, some low-income earners do not expect their children to do well in school" (p. 5).

Specific to Kentucky, the location of the research for this study, Marchetti et al. (2016) showed there is a statistically significant difference between free and reduced lunch (F/RL) students and non-free and reduced lunch (NF/RL) students in meeting the ACT math and reading benchmark scores. For NF/RL students, 58% in reading and 56% in math respectively met the benchmark, whereas for F/RL students only 39% in reading and 37% in math made the benchmark (Marchetti et al., 2016). This indicates that college choice, often conceptualized as enrollment in college, can change given environmental and non-academic circumstances (R. D. Cox, 2016). Kraft et al. (2015) articulated this reality using an analogy of the manufacturing industry:

> Unlike the predictable raw materials of the industrial assembly line, students range widely in interests, abilities, backgrounds, acquired skills, learning needs, attitudes, and effort. Therefore, within any class, a teacher constantly is encouraging, diagnosing, promoting, and managing the engagement and progress of some 20 to 30 students, whose behavior and responses are, at best, only partially predictable. (p. 754)

Traditional public schools are not closed organization systems, but rather they are open to the challenges that exist outside of their environment, specifically for low-income students, making it difficult to ignore socioeconomic problems their students may face (Kraft et al., 2015). A. B. Cox (2016) rationalized this belief through explaining the socioemotional cost to social mobility. Often upwardly mobile low-income students or students of Color experience normative cultures different from their own, and sometimes feel marginalized or excluded (A. B. Cox, 2016). She

posited that "like other forms of capital, social capital is unequally distributed. Access to resource-rich social ties varies by social position" (A. B. Cox, 2016, p. 48). This unequal distribution of social capital is part of the explanation for the growing gap among socioeconomic educational outcomes.

Growing gaps among socioeconomic educational outcomes. Using research from California schools, Klugman (2013) found that there is a structural imbalance of educational inequality due to the merit rewards system regarding educational content at the secondary level that translates into the postsecondary process. Effectively, students who attend high schools with access to the achievements valued by college gatekeepers are structurally guaranteed to attain them at higher rates than their peers who do not attend high schools with that same access:

> Enrolling in high-level curriculum is not just an "opportunity to learn" but also an opportunity to earn marks of distinction—achievements (academic or otherwise) valued by prestigious gatekeepers such as college admissions officers. To maintain their competitive edge, students from advantaged groups, such as high-SES families, will pursue an increasing number of distinctions, a dynamic that their schools facilitate. While opportunities to learn may increase among schools serving disadvantaged populations, they will increase at the same rate—or at a higher rate—at schools serving advantaged students. (Klugman, 2013, p. 2)

This reality is compounded by the fact that low-income students are already less likely to get a high school diploma, go to college, and earn a college degree when compared to their higher-income peers (R. D. Cox, 2016). This is partly because affluent households are in a better position to send their students to superior and more selective colleges due to their built in social, cultural, and human capital (Bastedo & Jaquette, 2011). Almeida (2016) stated that "The growth

of bachelor's degree completion of high-income students is over four times that of students from low-income families" (p. 311), further showcasing the lingering gap between low-income students and their peers in postsecondary outcomes.

The majority of growth in higher education in the last thirty years has been in the community college sector (Bastedo & Jaquette, 2011). Much of this growth has been from low-income students, partially due to better matching between low socioeconomic students and a college of their true academic ability. This can be somewhat attributed to the expansion of precollege academic preparation, especially in math (Bastedo & Jaquette, 2011). While growth in matching college and ability has coincided with a rise in community college attendance, this has not always had a positive correlation with improved long-term college outcomes for low-income students. Students who attend a community college are less likely to graduate from a four-year institution, and within four-year institutions that same relationship applies between selective and less selective colleges even when academic ability is controlled (Bastedo & Jaquette, 2011; Roderick, Coca, & Nagaoka, 2011). This is partly due to difficulty among some low-income students to meet college readiness benchmarks (Erickson & Sidhu, 2015). More low-income students are taking the ACT assessment on college readiness than ever before but the number of low-income students who meet at least three benchmarks have not improved (Erickson & Sidhu, 2015). Additionally, 50% of low-income students who take the assessment are not even meeting one of the academic benchmarks (Erickson & Sidhu, 2015). These systemic challenges that are largely borne out of structural inequity invite an analysis of the literature on low socioeconomic students' institutional value, capital, and knowledge regarding resources for educational success.

Low socioeconomic value, knowledge, and capital. Socioeconomics has a significant role in educational outcomes of students. For low-income students, the lack of economic value, knowledge, and capital within their social network is significant (A.B. Cox, 2016). That significance can be negative, as there are deficits associated with the institutions that provide value, knowledge, and capital to low socioeconomic students regarding college and career opportunities (Klugman, 2013; R. D. Cox, 2016).

Socio-institutional value. A. B. Cox (2016) described people in groups with resource-rich levels of social capital as "higher-status groups" (p. 48) and people in groups with resource-deficient levels of social capital as "lower-status groups" (p. 48). People in higher-status groups, such as Whites, men, high-income, and the highly educated, often have larger social networks that have more advantageous resources compared to others, specifically lower-status groups (A. B. Cox, 2016). Society also places a higher value on "middle and upper class families' cultural capital, including knowledge, skills, manners, dress, and linguistic ability" (Murillo et al., 2017, p. 238), which creates a system designed to keep dominant groups in power. This directly correlates with research from Marchetti et al. (2016) who affirmed "the wealthier a student's family, the higher the student's ACT and/or SAT score" (p. 5). Bastedo and Bowman (2017) explain that "students in the top income quartile are six times more likely to take the SAT and score 1200 or above compared to students in the lowest quartile" (p. 67-68). This socio-institutional value among higher-income families not only helps them perform better on standardized tests, but it helps establish a narrative among college admissions offices that low-income students who come from majority low-income secondary educational institutions may not have the academic ability to make it in college. This is correspondence bias. Correspondence bias is "the human tendency to attribute decisions to a person's disposition or personality rather

than to the situation in which the decision occurs" (Bastedo & Bowman, 2017, p. 68). This socio-institutional value discrepancy causes many colleges to believe that low-income students are not prepared for postsecondary academic rigor when they get there, whereas high schools believe they are (Almeida, 2016). This disconnect, according to Almeida (2016), is due in part to the lack of communication between secondary and postsecondary institutions, particularly in low-income communities.

A. B. Cox (2016) explained that the disconnect between low-income secondary students and their ability to succeed in college can be overcome through high school programs explicitly designed to create a connection between low-income students and elite secondary and postsecondary academic experiences. She explained, "these pipeline programs have contributed to the steady flow of students from diverse racial, ethnic, and class backgrounds into the nation's most elite private secondary schools" (A. B. Cox, 2016, p. 49). This connection is important for low-income students, who frequently rely upon school networks to obtain the social capital necessary for college planning and preparation. Holland and Farmer-Hinton (2009) stated this explicitly when they said students from low-income backgrounds "are less likely to have access to the human and material resources that are critical for college preparation" (Holland & Farmer-Hinton, 2009, p. 25). Schools where some low-income students attend lack the structural conditions and organizational ability to meet students' needs, even going so far as to "adversely influence students' educational aspirations and achievement" (Holland & Farmer-Hinton, 2009, p. 25) through notable decisions such as where schools are located, course offerings, and overall academic opportunities (Holland & Farmer-Hinton, 2009). College going goals and qualifications alone will not always translate into a four-year college opportunity, particularly if

schools do not have the organizational structures and norms to guide students through the college process (Roderick et al., 2011).

Students need a shared purpose and sense of belonging to develop within an educational setting, particularly in high schools. This makes it easier to trust those that are in the student's social network. A. B. Cox (2016) writes, "attendance at an elite private school often catapults socially and economically disadvantaged students into elite colleges and universities" (p. 49-50). This challenges the notion that low-income students could not thrive in academically rigorous environments. Low-income students taking high level academic classes in high school, as well as those who show academic discipline, persistence towards college, and enjoy social connections are more likely to be prepared for and enroll in a four-year college (Erickson & Sidhu, 2015). The challenge is that the majority of low-income high school students do not attend elite private institutions; many of them are in majority low-income schools that lack the socio-institutional value to ensure their students thrive (Holland & Farmer-Hinton, 2009). Subsequently, low-income students are less likely to have access to advanced placement (AP) and honors courses than their higher-income peers, as well as test taking preparatory courses and opportunities, which influences their competitiveness for more selective colleges even though they could succeed if given the chance (Bastedo & Bowman, 2017). College admissions counselors are not likely to automatically take this information into context, though, potentially underestimating the academic credentials of low-income students (Bastedo & Bowman, 2017). Many highly selective collegiate institutions look at AP exam scores as differentiators for applicants, thus impacting students' postsecondary opportunities if their scores are low or there is no score at all (Hallett & Venegas, 2011). However, there has been evidence that when introduced to the socio-institutional knowledge of how a low-income student may come from a school without the

structural supports to aid in their application, admissions officers do value these additional hurdles when reviewing applications (Bastedo & Bowman, 2017). Bastedo and Bowman (2017) found that socio-institutional knowledge of various high schools can play a role in college and career opportunities for low-income students.

Socio-institutional knowledge. Low-income students, particularly low-income students of Color, often have the qualifications for college but do not apply because of lack of information, guidance, and access to resources. A lack of formal and informal college knowledge plays a critical role in what low socioeconomic students do after high school (Murillo et al., 2017). In order to properly assess college as an option and successfully prepare for it, "high school students need information about their readiness for the rigors of college-level work as well as advice on the proper course selections and other strategies to become college ready during high school" (Almeida, 2016, p. 311). This is of particular relevance to low-income students as qualified low-income students are less likely to apply to selective colleges than their higher-income peers (Roderick et al., 2011). This was evidenced by little change in low-income students applying to Harvard after they guaranteed free tuition for accepted students with family incomes under $60,000 and also in the Texas law change where the top 10% of students received automatic admittance into any public college in Texas, regardless of test scores (Roderick et al., 2011).

Many students learn about college opportunities from their counselor or through postings on Facebook sponsored by their high school (Almeida, 2016). This is true for low-income students as well, as many low-income students generally "rely on their secondary schools for college preparation and guidance because they often have parents who have not completed college and they frequently live in communities where neighboring adults have not completed

college" (Holland & Farmer-Hinton, 2009, p. 25). However, the desire to go to college does not necessarily mean students have the socio-institutional knowledge necessary to get there. The aspiration to attend college exists among low-income students, but the knowledge on how to get there does not (Roderick et al., 2011). In 2013, 89% of Kentucky high school graduates who took the ACT said they aspired to obtain a postsecondary education, but only 55% actually enrolled (ACT, 2015). Erickson and Sidhu (2015) found that 84% of low-income students who take the ACT say they want to obtain a bachelor's degree or higher; Bastedo and Jaquette (2011) provided an analysis on how a lack of socio-institutional knowledge could prevent that from occurring:

> A typical high school cohort has about 30,000 low-income students who have high academic achievement, defined as SAT scores of at least 1300 and high school GPAs of at least 3.7. Of these students, only 18% send their SAT scores to at least one institution consonant with their own academic achievement, defined as a college whose median SAT composite score is not more than 5 percentiles below the student's score. (p. 331)

Roderick et al. (2011) explained that much of the disparity in applications to selective colleges between low-income students and their peers could be due to low-income students not having the knowledge to navigate the college going process. Low-income students sometimes misunderstand financial aid, often believing the process to be too difficult or not understanding the difference between sticker price and net price (Roderick et al., 2011). Socio-institutional knowledge can be pivotal for students in this situation, as high schools can help students cut the cost of college. Secondary schools that offer AP courses and internships create an advantage for their students, as passing AP exams can be a cost-saving option for college. AP exams typically cost less than $100 but high scores can eliminate the need for an entire college course, saving

hundreds if not thousands of dollars (Hallett & Venegas, 2011). Similarly, internships can be a source of aspirational capital for students, as well as a way to navigate the world of work. This can help create a college going network, as a lot of students ask supervisors for letters of recommendation (Murillo et al., 2017). Creating a network from these experiences can lead to the creation of social capital, which is critical for low-income student success.

Social capital. Social networks can provide access to support, information, and resources that an individual can use to gain employment, an academic credential, or deal with difficult decisions in life or work (A. B. Cox, 2016). For low-income students who may not have a network that society values, institutional agents can play an important role in creating a valuable social network for them. An institutional agent has access to resources of high value and can utilize their status for purposeful action (Stanton-Salazar, 2010), effectively creating social capital for others. Social capital is largely based on what groups, networks, or societal structures an individual participates in or is associated with, and that capital can provide a positive or negative advantage (A. B. Cox, 2016). Social support is an important organizational dynamic that is exhibited by constant communication, resource sharing, and establishing academic norms between faculty and staff (Holland & Farmer-Hinton, 2009). Social support is a form of social capital. Institutional agents, especially at high schools, are gatekeepers for social support systems.

Institutional agents are often the individuals who maintain the status quo of societal advantages for certain groups and people in high positions, but they are often the ones responsible for providing lower-status groups a variation of institutional support (Stanton-Salazar, 2010). To create institutional support for low-income students, small learning communities are key (Holland & Farmer-Hinton, 2009). Small learning communities contribute

to deeper student-staff relationships, higher attendance rates, lower dropout rates, and higher graduation rates, all of which are important indicators of postsecondary success. Smaller communities also give students more interaction with high school counselors, they inspire more teacher and counselor advocacy for students, and they contribute to more college specific conversations. These interactions contribute to a higher college going culture in the school, which leads to increased college enrollment (Holland & Farmer-Hinton, 2009). While understanding the importance of systemic and institutional issues, student-focused supports are also important for providing the best possible college and career outcomes for low-income students.

Student-focused college preparation and support. Student-focused treatments that emphasize college preparation and support have been effective in improving low socioeconomic student outcomes (Bettinger et al., 2012). Those treatments focus on systemic incentives for success and creating a college going culture within high schools.

Systemic incentives. Kentucky places an extra emphasis on helping students with significant educational outcome gaps, such as low-income students or students of Color, when it comes to monetarily rewarding achievement by schools and school districts. While there has been some improvement, there is still a wide gap with their peers (Marchetti et al., 2016). An additional change that benefits low-income students has been within the college financial aid system. When the Georgia Hope scholarship was advertised heavily, and its application process simplified through completion of the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA), it had a significant effect on college attendance (Bettinger et al., 2012). Conversely, the Social Security Administration eliminated a program that proactively sent reminders to students near their eighteenth birthday to tell them about collegiate financial aid, which led to reductions in

collegiate enrollment and educational attainment (Bettinger et al., 2012). These two examples impacted the college going culture for students in different ways, offering an opportunity to review how college going culture in high school can influence low-income students to attend college.

College going culture. Welton and Williams (2015) explained that having a college going culture in a high school raises academic expectations while also making sure students have the resources and are prepared and supported for what it would take for collegiate success. More than academics, though, a culture requires administrators to talk about college frequently, as a part of building the culture. Holland and Farmer-Hinton (2009) explained this duality in depth:

> College culture reflects environments that are accessible to all students and saturated with ever-present information and resources and ongoing formal and informal conversations that help students to understand the various facets of preparing for, enrolling in, and graduating from postsecondary academic institutions as those experiences specifically pertain to the students' current and future lives. (p. 26)

A good college going culture invokes social support and social capital, creating a personal relationship between the high school staff and the students (Welton & Williams, 2015). Murillo et al. (2017) note "a college-going culture is an organizational practice where curriculum, high standards, school personnel, values, expectations, beliefs, and institutional resources are aligned to support the college aspirations of students" (p. 239). Students in urban high schools are more likely to attend college if their high school has a culture of college attendance and acceptance, and teachers have high expectations and there is high participation in financial aid discussions and process completion (Murillo et al., 2017; Roderick et al., 2011). Still, college preparation is not enough to close the gap between low-income students and their higher-income peers in

postsecondary outcomes. Relles (2017) wrote that even though low-income college student enrollment has increased in the past 20 years, only 10% of low-income students earn a four-year college degree, whereas 76% of high-income students do. While many of the challenges facing low-income students are not related to their academic ability as students, there are classroom related issues facing low-income students that must be understood.

Classroom-specific challenges. The classroom specific challenges that impact low-income student success revolve around teacher quality and administrative barriers.

Teacher quality and administrative barriers. Compared to more affluent schools, high poverty schools with a high number of students of Color have fewer quality teachers and less access to rigorous college preparation programs (Welton & Williams, 2015). This is the case with AP courses and exams, as Hallett and Venegas (2011) found that low-income students who took AP exams had low passing rates and "received dramatically lower scores on the AP exams when compared to grades received in AP courses" (Hallett & Venegas, 2011, p. 474). The tandem of less quality teachers and less rigorous college preparation programs in high poverty schools means the courses that are offered that are supposed to be considered advanced, such as AP courses, may not be advanced at all compared to their peers and therefore may not always lead to academic success (Hallett & Venegas, 2011).

Additionally, lack of success in other testing situations can have an influence on culture and cause high turnover among staff in majority low-income school districts:

> Practices such as intentionally retaining students to prevent them from taking the exit-exam, or placing students in special education so their achievement outcomes do not weigh as heavily on a school's accountability rating, position students at the bottom rung of a school's opportunity structure. (Welton & Williams, 2015, p. 184)

This behavior from administrators has also taken a toll on students academically. Low-income high school students average 20 percentage points lower on ACT achievement scores than the average student in English, reading, math, and science (Erickson & Sidhu, 2015). Further, over 60% of low-income students score below the ACT benchmarks in reading, math, and science (Erickson & Sidhu, 2015) and only 11% of low-income students who take the ACT meet all four benchmarks, compared to 26% of all students. Half of the low-income students who take the ACT do not meet a single benchmark (Erickson & Sidhu, 2015). This trend continues when students get to college, as low-income students are more likely to take remedial courses than their wealthy peers (Almeida, 2016). This environment of chronic academic failure can lead to policy experimentation from policymakers that ultimately inspires unintended consequences.

Common methodologies. The methodologies discussed in this section are specific to the articles reviewed for the low socioeconomic student portion of the literature review. While some articles did not identify a clear methodology for how the researcher developed the scholarship produced within the study (e.g., see Berliner, 2013; Stanton-Salazar, 2010), many researchers used quantitative methods. The data sets were often pulled from large corporations, government agencies, or local school districts (e.g., see ACT, 2015; Bettinger et al., 2012; Marchetti et al., 2016; Roderick et al., 2011) and focused on low-income students and the factors that might impact their ability to gain acceptance into a postsecondary opportunity. In the studies that used regression as an analysis tool, many of the variables were items that, while defined in the study, could be defined differently in other studies. Some of those variables were competitiveness of the postsecondary institution, income cutoffs for low-income households, and factors that demonstrate a high school has a strong college going culture (e.g., see ACT, Inc., 2015; Bastedo

& Bowman, 2017; Bastedo & Jaquette, 2011; Bettinger et al., 2012; Erickson & Sidhu, 2015; Holland & Farmer-Hinton, 2009). There were some articles that used a mixed methods approach.

The articles that used mixed methods mainly did so for providing descriptive statistics that were applicable to the topic of the study (e.g., see Hallett & Venegas, 2011; Klugman, 2013; Murillo et al., 2017). Like the aforementioned quantitative only articles, many of the definitions for the variables were guided by the study but could potentially be defined differently if used in a different study. The authors of these mixed methods articles also seemed to recognize that conducting research on a topic from a socioeconomic lens may provide the opportunity to utilize qualitative methods to provide rich, thick description on a particular aspect of the study. The studies often focused on the intersections of race and income (e.g., see Murillo et al., 2017), and how that effected low socioeconomic students' postsecondary opportunity.

There was not a favored approach in the qualitive studies. There was, however, a constant usage of the constructivist or critical epistemological lens. Many researchers seemed to regularly challenge or modify the traditional theories of how and why low-income students do not achieve postsecondary choice at a level of parity with their higher income peers (e.g., see Welton & Williams, 2015; Almeida, 2016; R. D. Cox, 2016). Many articles were also anchored by the same foundational theories and frameworks, creating a shared foundation of knowledge to analyze how low-income students are guided through the secondary system towards college and career opportunities.

Common theories and conceptual frameworks. Many of the articles within the low socioeconomic student section of the literature review used a variation of Bourdieu's theory of social capital to describe structural barriers holding back low-income students from achieving postsecondary opportunity parity with their higher income peers. The researchers use their

epistemological lens to modify Bourdieu's work, either through critical critique or through a shift in how the framework is used (e.g., see A. B. Cox, 2016; Hallett & Venegas, 2011; Holland & Farmer-Hinton, 2009; Murillo et al., 2017; Relles, 2017). This appears to have created a consensus within the scholarship on low-income students and college and career opportunities that academic preparation plays a role, but social capital and the activation of a college-oriented social network is essential (e.g., see Almeida, 2016; Bastedo & Bowman, 2017; R. D. Cox, 2016; Hallett & Venegas, 2011; Stanton-Salazar, 2010; Welton & Williams, 2015). As a result, much of the scholarship focuses on how to obtain that social capital and how to sustain it within communities so that low-income students can have full access to postsecondary opportunities. To understand this shared foundation of knowledge on how low-income students and their challenges impact career and college choices, it is important to understand how high school counselors participate in the college and career pathway selection process for high school students.

The School Counselor

There were four themes as a result of the research on the school counselor role and how counselors influence postsecondary decision-making. The themes are: 1) systems dependent, 2) access to postsecondary opportunity, knowledge, and capital, 3) counselor-driven college preparation and support, and 4) professional challenges of school counselors.

The systems dependent theme reviews the topics of counselors being influenced by programming, policies, and families and administrators. The theme of access to postsecondary opportunity, knowledge, and capital focuses on the topics of counselors providing social capital to students, and counselors acting as influencers over school culture. The theme of counselor-driven college preparation and support reviews how counselors contribute to student

achievement, student equity, and college preparation. Finally, the theme of professional challenges discusses counselor associations, how the counselor role has been historically defined, and counselor training, confidence, and decision-making.

Systems dependent. School counselors are roles that are influenced by programming, policy and caseloads, and the students, families, and administrators with whom they work. Identifying how these systems connect together as a structure that best meets student needs is important research for the field (Deslonde & Becerra, 2018).

Influenced by counseling programs. Research is mixed on intensive college counseling programs producing student success (Castleman & Goodman, 2015). Alger and Luke (2015) explained that comprehensive counseling programs in schools that are effective at improving achievement among students work deliberately with parents and teachers to ensure equitable access to learning opportunities along with rigorous curriculum. McDonough (2005) developed a framework that could be used for such a comprehensive school counseling program:

> 1) structuring information and organizing activities that foster and support students' college aspirations and an understanding of college and its importance, 2) assisting parents in understanding their role in fostering and supporting college aspirations, setting of college expectations, and motivating students; 3) assisting students in academic preparation for college; 4) supporting and influencing students in decision-making about college, and 5) organizationally focusing the school on its college mission. (p. 23)

Developing programming for counselors can pay dividends for student success. Engberg and Gilbert (2013) learned that schools who asked counselors to focus on helping with financial aid were roughly 12% higher in rates of college-going for their students, and schools that did college fairs were 9% higher on college-going than schools that did not. Likewise, college counseling

programs designed specifically to steer low-income students to specific colleges for both academic and financial purposes work and can help with persistence of those same students when they get to college (Castleman & Goodman, 2015).

High school counselors specifically have also suggested that using online curriculum on the college-going process helps with their influence and aids them in developing a strategy around getting students to make an informed postsecondary decision (Deslonde & Becerra, 2018). A counseling program utilizing online technology could potentially increase resources and information regarding college access (Christian et al., 2017). Another way for high school counselors to increase information regarding the college decision-making process is through experiential programming such as workshops or presentations, college-related field trips, and going through the application process in detail (Deslonde & Becerra, 2018). The existing counseling model, designed to help students one-on-one, could be a disadvantage to low-income students who may lack the social resources to navigate the college going process (Stephan & Rosenbaum 2013). Shamsuddin (2016) makes the case that new evaluations of college preparation may be needed, as the conventional understanding that students are first predisposed to college, then they search for where they want to go, and finally choose a college to enroll may no longer be adequate, given the myriad of complex challenges that exist in schools. While many aspects of the counselor role are influenced by counselor programming, counselors are also influenced by federal, state, or local policies.

Influenced by policies and caseload. In the last decade, there were many federal programs designed to empower high school counselors specifically to improve college attainment rates for low-income students (Bryan et al., 2015). State and school district-level policies can influence how college counseling resources are available to students as well,

particularly due to counselor-to-student ratio policies and counselor resource allocations (Hill, 2011). Counselors, often considered by policymakers to be weak positions with unclear roles, have been constrained, partially by budget cuts, from maximizing their ability to help students excel academically and achieve their college goals (McDonough, 2005). Deslonde and Becerra (2018) argued that institutionalizing the best practices that make high school counselors in particular influential to low socioeconomic student postsecondary decision-making "could assist school administrators in strategically, aggressively, and thoughtfully addressing the declining college enrollment rates among students from low socioeconomic backgrounds" (p. 21). State and local policies that restrict hiring and complicate college access create structural problems with regard to college counseling opportunities from high school counselors (McKillip, Rawls, & Barry, 2012). Bryan et al. (2015) described that low expectations from school personnel can provide barriers for student success, specifically "structural barriers such as attending schools where school counselors have high caseloads that limit their ability to meet students' needs for college admission counseling" (p. 7).

District level policies that reduce funding for college preparation initiatives, add more responsibility to counselors, and encourage quick firing of principals destabilize the college preparation infrastructure in urban high schools (Hill, 2011). Public high school counselors at majority low-income high schools spend less than a quarter of their time on college counseling, whereas private high school counselors spend more than half of their time on college counseling (Engberg & Gilbert, 2013). High school college counseling systems that are successful in preparing students for college have enough counselors on staff, available materials about the college going process, regular contact with students, visits from college representatives, and a multi-year plan for student success (Hill, 2011). Structural factors lead urban schools to receive

less funding while serving more students than their suburban counterparts, and budget constraints impact hiring and retaining staff, saddling counselors with high caseloads that limit individualized attention to student needs (Shamsuddin, 2016).

The high caseload sometimes forces high school counselors to focus on upperclassmen, making underclassmen feel neglected and miss out on key access to college resources early in their college career (Engberg & Gilbert, 2013). Hurtwiz and Howell (2014) found that an additional high school counselor is expected to increase four-year college enrollment by 10%. McKillip et al. (2012) argued it was unclear how directly larger caseloads influence high school counselors' ability to do their jobs; Hurtwiz and Howell (2014) seemingly agreed to some extent when they explained that increasing high school counselors in perpetuity would have diminishing returns:

> Although the biggest jump in 4-year college-going might be achieved from increasing the number of school counselors from one to two, it is unlikely that a comparably large jump would be achieved by increasing the number of school counselors from three to four. (p. 323)

Engberg and Gilbert (2013) found that the high school counselor caseload must be analyzed in "conjunction with the allocation of time toward college related tasks as well as the primacy of college preparation among the larger goals of a counseling department" (p. 237) in order to get a total picture of how that caseload impacts college-going rates. Still, improving the counselor-to-student ratio by increasing the number of high school counselors specifically can reduce the likelihood of not going to college for first-generation students, as well as reducing disciplinary actions in schools, and improving attendance rates (Hurtwiz & Howell, 2014). When high school counselors have larger caseloads, it ends up putting the onus on students and families to reach

out about college preparation opportunities (Engberg & Gilbert, 2013). Having more counselors in schools means their jobs can be split up in order to meet certain student needs more efficiently (Hurtwiz & Howell, 2014). One need could include forming deeper relationships with parents, families, and administrators.

Influenced by parents, families, and administrators. School counselors should work with parents, colleges, and administrators to create a college-going culture in their high schools (Paolini, 2019). Administrators, namely principals, sometimes have different opinions about what counselors ought to be doing compared to what counselors themselves believe they should be doing, often leading to high turnover in the counselor position due to tension (Carnes-Holt et al., 2012). Paolini (2019) said "school counselors, administrators, and educators need to work together to ensure that a career and college-going culture is promoted and integrated into their school climate" (p. 6).

In schools that serve majority low-income students, the counselors often do not have a close working relationship with parents, even though parents have a significant influence over student postsecondary decision making (McDonough, 2005). Bryan et al. (2015) emphasized the importance of counselors working directly with parents to improve student outcomes towards college attainment, stating that "counselors working with 9th grade students could be required to meet individually with students and their parents to help plan out their four-year high school plan" (p. 15). Counselors who do work with low-income students and their families sometimes find that families are often as uninformed about the college readiness process as their students (Savitz-Romer, 2012). Paolini (2019) recommended community outreach to ensure success, suggesting "school counselors can meet with community organizations or agencies and develop a college and career planning information workshop for parents" (p. 9). Community venues could

also make access easier and encourage counselors to meet with parents in groups during evening hours to accommodate work schedules, creating an opportunity to discuss academic planning and financial aid (Bryan et al., 2015).

McDonough (2005) discussed practical ways for counselors to provide support for parents and students, such as easing anxiety about the process, advocating for students with letters of recommendation, coaching on tests and essays, and helping find the best college match. Hill (2011) provided an approach to deliver this kind of systemic support:

> Evidence from existing research strongly suggests that college counseling strategies that are supported both by ample resources and by strong norms of equitable outreach to students and families (i.e., brokering) provide the most effective support for successful transitions to four-year college. (p. 39)

High schools that use the brokering strategy for their college preparation believe counselors should initiate contact to students and families regarding college opportunities (Hill, 2011). Bryan et al. (2015) expressed that the brokering model of counseling was important for counselors who were committed to student success because “partnerships are the source of counseling, education, mentoring, and enrichment programs that meet the academic, personal-social and college-career needs of large caseloads of students” (p. 13). Counselors could potentially provide access to postsecondary opportunities to the low-income students they serve.

Access to postsecondary capital, opportunity, and knowledge. For students seeking postsecondary opportunities, counselors operate as a form of capital, opportunity, and knowledge that is critical to student success (Stephan & Rosenbaum, 2013).

Providers of social capital. Navigating the complex college-going process requires resources that focus on academic and financial preparation, but also resources that are social in

nature (Stephan & Rosenbaum, 2013). Deslonde and Becerra (2018) explained "students from low socioeconomic backgrounds have limited social capital in their families, requiring that they seek information on postsecondary opportunities from non-familial sources" (p. 3). High school counselors are able to provide the social capital to low-income students that many low-income students may not have due to their economic environment (Shamsuddin, 2016). Bryan, Moore-Thomas, Day-Vines, and Holcomb-McCoy (2011) define social capital as "the resources that flow through relationship ties" (p. 190), listing school as a primary social capital source for K-12 students.

In the higher education context, "social capital refers to a student's access to knowledge and resources about postsecondary education relayed through relationships that comprise a student's social network" (Cholewa, Burkhardt, & Hull, 2015, p. 145). With regard to postsecondary opportunities, school counselors can be particularly helpful for students who do not have people in their lives who have ever navigated the college-going process (McKillip et al., 2012). Bryan et al. (2011) made clear that counselors can be a source of social capital for college choice:

> School counselor assistance with the college admissions process can provide the strong network and social capital that can compensate for family networks when students' parents have limited resources. Furthermore, when referring to college information, adults in the school may provide the only source of social capital for low-income students and students of color who are first-generation college students. (p. 190)

Often times, for low-income students, the high school counselor is the only credible source who can engage college related questions (Bryan et al., 2015).

High school counselors can also share institutional information, as well as resources, with students to get them to think and plan for the postsecondary future (Savitz-Romer, 2012). One of the resources counselors could share is time through individual interaction, which McKillip et al. (2012) pointed out as a tool for high school counselors that could pay dividends for college preparation:

> Individualized services also require that school counselors address individual student needs. In other words, counselors should account for the social capital that they are able to access from other sources, and provide additional information and guidance for each student to succeed. (p. 55)

Castleman and Goodman (2015) cautioned that without a high level of engagement from counselors or other professionals, students could become frustrated "about where they can access professional assistance with college or financial aid applications, and as a result may forego completing these applications entirely or may miss out on key deadlines" (p. 2).

Socioeconomic status may limit the amount of social capital available for students, but school counselors can help close that social capital gap between low socioeconomic students and their peers (Cholewa et al., 2015). Counselors could close this gap through their ability to influence postsecondary opportunities for students.

Catalysts of opportunity. Regarding postsecondary decision-making, school counselors provide information through contact, and act as significant influencers for underrepresented students (Cholewa et al., 2015). Bryan et al. (2015) found that "low-income students were more likely to see the school counselor as well as students in high-poverty schools and schools with smaller student-counselor ratios" (p. 7). Counselors are important to "improving college enrollment outcomes for students in the United States, particularly those students from

racial/ethnic, first-generation, and low socioeconomic backgrounds" (Deslonde & Becerra, 2018, p. 5). Having contact with a high school counselor regarding postsecondary opportunities mitigates the deterrent that coming from a low socioeconomic background creates for students who apply to postsecondary opportunities (Bryan et al., 2011). Shamsuddin (2016) found that "the availability of college counseling in high school is a major difference between students who enroll in college and those who do not" (p. 5). This impact is especially true if counselors have contact with students when the students are underclassmen:

> Students who saw the counselor for college information by 10th grade were more likely to apply to college compared with students who did not see the counselor for college information. Those who saw the counselor by 10th grade had twice greater odds of applying to one school (vs. none) and 3.5 times greater odds of applying to two or more schools (vs. none). (Bryan et al., 2011, p. 194)

Counselors play an important role in college and career pathways for students because they are the keepers of important resources and information related to the college application process (Christian et al., 2017), but it is not always clear what information they are sharing (Shamsuddin, 2016). McKillip et al. (2012) found that some high school counselors act as gatekeepers while others take a college-for-all posture. McKillip et al. explained that "gatekeeping means discouraging certain students from attending college but encouraging others, while the college-for-all approach refers to lukewarmly encouraging all students towards college" (p. 53). There is, however, another option for the mindset counselors can have regarding how to influence postsecondary decision-making for students:

> They create a worldview for students and their parents that delimits the full universe of 3000 possible college choices into a smaller range (1-8) of cognitively manageable

considerations. Schools and counselors construct this worldview in response to their perceptions of the parents' and community's expectations for appropriate college destinations, combined with the counselor's own knowledge and experience base. (McDonough, 2005, p. 22)

School counselors are positioned to support students at all levels because they can help create a college-going culture in their schools, and the need has never been higher (Bryan et al., 2015). A way that counselors can support students is through building relationships and sharing their knowledge.

Knowledgeable and relational actors. Many counselors believe that their relationships with students, developed by open communication, continuous encouragement, responsible engagement, and being non-judgmental, contributed to their ability to be influential actors regarding students' postsecondary decisions (Deslonde & Becerra, 2018). Paolini (2019) advised that building relationships with parents was key as well, and that "discussing post-secondary options, assisting parents with the financial aid process, and offering additional resources to parents makes a profound impact in their participation and involvement" (p. 13). Engberg and Gilbert (2013) found that "lower-income students depend on counselor input regarding academic planning for college, and when they view counselors negatively they are less likely to seek them out for information, thereby cutting off an essential source of information" (p. 223). For students, there is a positive correlation between meeting with a high school counselor and applying to college and subsequently enrolling (Christian et al., 2017). Counselors, when regularly available to provide services to their students, "can be a highly effective group of professionals who positively impact students' aspirations, achievements, and financial aid knowledge" (McDonough, 2005, p. 2). Students who had direct advising from high school counselors

regarding college were more likely to apply and enroll in college (Cholewa et al., 2015).

Deslonde and Becerra (2018) discovered that high school counselors are valuable informants of college information, particularly for students whose parents have a low or narrow college knowledge-base. Paolini (2019) rationalized this in detail:

> School counselors can review graduation requirements; inform students of the processes of registering and preparing for placement tests such as the SAT or ACT; help students to understand how to interpret their test scores; assist students in determining which schools provide their desired majors; discuss steps to applying for financial aid, scholarships, and grants; hold college fairs and meeting with recruiters, and assist students in applying to community or technical schools. (p. 11)

The high school counselor is a key factor in determining a high school student's college preparation and aspiration (Deslonde & Becerra, 2018; McDonough, 2005). This includes financial decisions, as high school students sometimes seek advice on financing college through loans from their school counselor or the office of financial aid at the colleges where they were accepted (Johnson, O'Neill, Worthy, Lown, & Bowen, 2016). This seems to be appropriate, given that "counseling during high school affects college choice and affordability" (Castleman & Goodman, 2015, p. 16). High school counselors should get more involved in the decision-making process for financing a postsecondary opportunity for students (Johnson et al., 2016). Engberg and Gilbert (2013) explained that knowing how to finance college is a top consideration for students making college choices and that high school counselors "can provide education and resources that illuminate financial aid possibilities" (p. 220). While it is clear that high school counselors can provide access to resources, they can also drive college preparation and support in a deliberate way.

Counselor-driven college preparation and support. Counselors can drive student achievement, student equity, and college preparation (McDonough, 2005).

Counselor-driven student achievement. There is robust policy conversation designed to improve college access and completion for low-income students, but it is unclear if the suggested, scalable strategies work for students who also struggle academically and are not very far in the college preparation process (Castleman & Goodman, 2015). High school counselors can play a role in changing that, as high school counselors help students pace themselves for a strong academic finish at the end of high school (Paolini, 2019). Furthermore, students who take more rigorous courses in high school have a higher likelihood of both applying and being successful in college (Christian et al., 2017). High school counselors can be beneficial in this regard as well because students have indicated that learning more likely takes place in a school with high school counselor programs dedicated to student achievement (Bodenhorn, Wolfe, & Airen, 2010).

Beyond high school, high school counselors play an important role for advancing students college and career interests by making them more competitive candidates for jobs and postsecondary opportunities (Paolini, 2019). Castleman and Goodman (2015) suggested that "providing high-achieving, low-income students with customized information about their postsecondary options can result in students attending and persisting at higher-quality institutions" (p. 3). Counselors can significantly contribute to high school students reaching college enrollment goals (McKillip et al., 2012). That contribution can be made through coordinating college visits or taking college courses, as Engberg and Gilbert (2013) determined high schools that offered college visits or college courses increased college-going rates by 7%.

While improving educational achievements and outcomes for low-income students is supported by education professional and policymakers alike, gaps remain at rates similar to those in the 1970s. Low-income students are graduating high school at rates lower than their high-income peers, and that number continues to be disproportionately represented in college (McDonough, 2005). High school counselors help students become more competitive for postsecondary opportunities through resume and skill-building by encouraging students to join career-specific clubs in high school, as well as getting students involved in community service (Paolini, 2019). Focusing on closing these achievement gaps through high school counselors could directly influence student equity.

Counselor-driven student equity. Historically, counselors often behaved as gatekeepers, picking and choosing which students they provided college preparation materials to, often leaving out low-income students (McDonough, 2005). High school counselors would sometimes steer students away from college if those students did not appear to be academically prepared or ready (Engberg & Gilbert, 2013) and counselors have been criticized for their disparate services rendered to different student groups (Bryan et al., 2011). Holland (2015) said "gatekeepers preserve inequality, institutional agents assist youth with social mobility by acting as empowering agents" (p. 246).

Now, school counselors behave more like empowering agents and focus on educational equity and multicultural competency in the field (Bodenhorn et al., 2010). College going rates are now improving for low-income students, but they are not yet at parity with their high-income peers (Castleman & Goodman, 2015). A reason for that could be due to issues related to economic equity:

> Financial limitations (the desire to work instead of attending college to help support the family) were potential roadblocks to students pursuing postsecondary education. Counselors also noted that when families struggle financially, students make the decision to focus more on finding a job rather than focus on academic and college readiness. (Deslonde & Becerra, 2018, p. 13)

Economic concerns play a role in inconsistent support from families due to the costs of college and the financial realities of students needing to work to contribute to financial obligations (Savitz-Romer, 2012). Still, high school counselors can focus on inequalities among students seeking to transition from high school to college (McKillip et al., 2012). They are positioned to promote college access and equity for students with less social capital, including low-income students, due to their knowledge and skill set regarding postsecondary opportunities (Cholewa et al., 2015). However, Bryan et al. (2011) found that lower socioeconomic students are less likely to apply to college than their higher income peers. Furthermore, schools with majority high poverty students have roughly one counselor per school, compared to roughly three counselors per every public school (McDonough, 2005). Engberg and Gilbert (2013) decided that these were equity related issues when they stated that "students who attend schools with primarily low-income or high minority student populations are less likely to receive adequate college counseling due to fewer counselors, higher caseloads, and other counseling responsibilities" (p. 222).

An issue with student equity could be due to both counselor quality and the quality of the counseling system. Schools with majority high-income students have access to high quality counselors, whereas majority low-income schools have access to counselors who are often inadequate (McDonough, 2005). High schools that use a clearinghouse college preparation

strategy have a robust system of college going resources for students, but those resources are not distributed equitably (Hill, 2011). When high schools use a broker strategy for college preparation, which Hill (2011) called "an exceptional structure for college planning" (p. 39), the resources are available for students and distributed equitably to students due to deliberate outreach to students and families. Equitable distribution of college planning resources through high school counselors can impact how counselors prepare students for college.

Counselor-driven college preparation. Shamsuddin (2016) found that most students want to go to college, and counselors supported them in their interest. School counselors are vital for college counseling and access to those counselors is critical in the college decision-making process (Bryan et al., 2011). Cholewa et al. (2015) suggested that there is a "positive association between number of school counselors and four-year college going rates" (p. 145) and that counselors spending more time with students on college preparation is also important. This is especially true for low socioeconomic students, who often need additional support for college preparation, including learning the college going process, and meeting college-specific application deadlines (Deslonde & Becerra, 2018). McDonough (2005) stated that "individual college opportunity is predicated on K-12 institutional opportunity" (p. 5). Schools should have a college-going culture to improve the likelihood of student college enrollment and attainment, and counselors can be pivotal in creating that culture (Bryan et al., 2015). The earlier college preparation starts, the better (Christian et al., 2017). Schools have better college-going outcomes for students when they start college preparation in ninth grade (McKillip et al., 2012). According to Christian et al. (2017), "school counselors are tasked with helping students obtain the knowledge and information necessary for them to make an informed decision regarding college application and enrollment" (p. 28).

Many students who attend urban high schools are not being prepared for college, though, but the American public believes that high schools should be preparing students to go to college (Hill, 2011). Christian et al. (2017) found that students seem to appreciate when counselors use their roles for college preparation, stating that "providing students with quality information regarding college access is key to students' reported level of satisfaction with their school counselors" (p. 30). Deslonde and Becerra (2018) also found that the common theme among high school counselors who had an increased influence on student postsecondary options was that they were always "promoting college aspirations, having high expectations, and providing informational resources" (p. 12). Spending the time necessary to create a college going culture is a real contributor to increased college attendance:

> Schools in which counselors spend between 11 and 20 percent of their time on college-related counseling were associated with lower average college going rates (approximately eight percentage points) compared to schools with counselors who spend over 50 % of their time on college counseling. (Engberg & Gilbert, 2013, p. 232)

Regarding college preparation resources, Shamsuddin (2016) explained that the information that counselors provided to students was very factual in nature, often focusing on how the postsecondary process worked, what websites can provide information on which schools, and awareness that college was even an option. Savitz-Romer (2012) found that counselors regularly dealt with students who either had low expectations of themselves, or they had low motivation to go through the college process. Using both approaches, high school counselors can help with college preparation by encouraging students to push themselves academically, helping students complete the FAFSA so they have full access to financial support, and working with colleges to set up direct lines of communication between students and

postsecondary institutions (Paolini, 2019). Counselors can be important for driving postsecondary opportunities for students, but challenges remain within the profession that impede counselors' potential.

Professional challenges of school counselors. The professional characteristics regarding the school counselor include national associations, the historical descriptions of the counselor positions, and how counselors are trained in decision-making.

The American School Counselor Association. National counseling organizations state that the purpose of high school counselors is for academic achievement and college readiness and access (Engberg & Gilbert, 2013). Alger and Luke (2015) explained that through academic development, counselors can incorporate strategies to maximize learning for all students. As cited in Cholewa et al. (2015), the American School Counseling Association (ASCA) asks school counselors "to be systems change agents and promote access to postsecondary educational opportunities to all students" (p. 146). In 2003, as cited in Bodenhorn et al. (2010) the ASCA developed "an organizational model grounded in a foundation tied to the school mission and needs assessments" (p. 165). The ASCA national model for comprehensive counseling programs has been beneficial for counselors in providing knowledge for college and career opportunities for students (Alger & Luke, 2015). The model directs counselors to provide the "skills and knowledge, along with opportunities to apply those skills and knowledge during and after the transition from high school into the world of work or post-secondary education" (Alger & Luke, 2015, p. 18).

Despite the ASCA model, counselors perform duties that often include test administration, drug and substance counseling, personal growth development, and class scheduling (Engberg & Gilbert, 2013). Carnes-Holt et al. (2012) said that the ASCA explicitly

encourages counselors to discuss and make clear to principals what their responsibilities and expectations are within their specific school context. Historically, the counselor role was very different.

A descriptive history of school counselor responsibilities. Counselors roles are often ill-defined, putting them at odds with principals who have a different opinion on what their job as counselors should be (Hurtwiz & Howell, 2014). Today, many school counselors are specifically charged with teaching and guiding students through the college enrollment process (Hill, 2011), but some used to believe the high school counselor role was better spent doing mental health counseling, due to the elitist idea of passing out college pamphlets to only a handful of students (McDonough, 2005).

Hill (2011) called the high school college counseling system a core piece of the infrastructure of the student support system in high school, defining infrastructure as "knowledge, material and practices and strategies developed to fulfill an increasingly important organizational goal among public high schools: preparing students for successful transitions to college" (p. 37). Jefferson County Public Schools (JCPS), the largest public school district in Kentucky, asks their counselors to focus on "the academic, career, and personal/social development of all students" (JCPS, 2018a, para. 1). Counselors were initially added to schools for the purpose of college and career exploration, but then found their position expanded to include administrative work and mental health counseling (Christian et al., 2017). High school counselors' non-college preparation duties expanded right when more and more students were interested in attending college, creating a strain on time and resources of high school counselors who were tasked with college preparation (McKillip et al., 2012).

Some of the confusion on counselor responsibility is due to principal priorities. Carnes-

Holt et al. (2012) explained that "many practicing principals learn about the roles of school counselors through field experience, and most importantly, do not understand how to use the school counselor to increase student achievement" (p. 4). Counselors should work with administrators to produce data-driven solutions that promote equity for all students in the building, fostering college readiness through social, vocational, and academic counseling services (Paolini, 2019). Counselors, though, often end up serving as an administrative catch-all:

> Principals have reported that school counselors should do whatever was needed such as lunch duty, bus duty, and/or coordinating testing. Such duties are not within the scope of counseling duties and are more appropriate for the assistant principal or even the clerical staff. (Carnes-Holt et al., 2012, p. 5)

Counselor-to-student ratios have ballooned to 491:1, taking away time that could be devoted to college counseling (Christian et al., 2017). Counselors roles have also expanded beyond traditional counseling entirely, ranging from test proctor to school disciplinarian, which can undermine the counselors' dual role as a confidant and advocate for students (McDonough, 2005). Due to the myriad of conflicting and ever-expanding responsibilities, counselors are sometimes unable to build meaningful relationships with students in order to focus on college preparation (Engberg & Gilbert, 2013). The reality of the changing responsibilities and nature of the counselor role could be having an impact on counselor training, self-confidence, and decision-making.

Counselor training, self-efficacy, and decision-making. A significant reason why there is a gap in college enrollment between low-income students and their peers is because of inadequate high school counseling (McDonough, 2005). Factors that influence a counselor's ability are the counselor's educational and professional experiences as well as their role in the

school (Alger & Luke, 2015). Regarding their school role, counselors often view themselves as administrators and professionals, whereas principals are not always aligned to this belief (Carnes-Holt et al., 2012). When counselors have an unclear description of their job, other duties compete with college counseling (McKillip et al., 2012). While high school counselors can help improve college opportunities for low-income students, they are often part of the problem of college preparation inequity due to their lack of formal training on college readiness (Savitz-Romer, 2012). Engberg and Gilbert (2013) found that "many high school counselors lack sufficient training and expertise to navigate the complexities of the college choice process and have limited educational training in college counseling" (p. 220).

Savitz-Romer (2012) suggested that this limited training and knowledge on college counseling can influence the confidence of a counselor, as many counselors do not feel prepared to provide the adequate college readiness resources because there is little emphasis in their academic curriculum on the topic. Counselors who have higher confidence in their ability to do their job as a counselor often perform better, according to their supervisors (Bodenhorn et al., 2010). Strong counselors would significantly improve college access for low-income students (McDonough, 2005). But Holland (2015) observed that counselors are often "in constant triage mode, focusing only on students whom they think they can best help" (p. 247). Savitz-Romer (2012) captured this sentiment when counselors were asked about student-specific challenges in their role and how they handled them:

> Although some of these personal issues did not preclude participants from addressing postsecondary education planning, it often shaped the process in a significant way. For example, students who live on their own, reside in shelters, are in the custody of social

> services, have their own children, or do not possess legal documentation all require specific consideration and care when discussing postsecondary education. (p. 104)

Many counselors also feel significant pressure to counsel students properly, feeling concern about pressuring a student to choose a postsecondary outcome they ultimately cannot handle, or trying too hard to overcompensate for social capital that might be missing (Savitz-Romer, 2012). Shamsuddin (2016) offered an example of how this equivocation could influence students making postsecondary decisions:

> Counselors were reluctant to intervene when students expressed interest in specific colleges where they would be highly unlikely to gain admission because of their grades and test scores. Students often compiled lists of colleges that included several highly selective institutions where their chances of admission were extremely low. When students searched for more information on school computers, counselors helped them locate the websites of individual colleges regardless of the match with student academic performance. Counselors adopted a similar approach in one-on-one meetings by intentionally refusing to dissuade students from applying to colleges that were likely beyond their academic reach. (p. 114)

While well intentioned, this behavior from counselors could set students up to make bad decisions regarding their postsecondary opportunities.

Common methodologies. The methodologies discussed in this section are specific to the articles reviewed for the school counselor portion of the literature review. Some articles did not identify detailed methods for how the researcher developed the scholarship produced within the study (e.g., see Carnes-Holt et al., 2012; McDonough, 2005; McKillip et al., 2012; Paolini, 2019). Of the ones that did, many researchers used quantitative methods. The data were gathered

from counselor associations, large school districts, or schools and focused on the school counselor as a professional, using variables that could impact student achievement (e.g., see Bryan et al., 2011; Bryan et al., 2015; Castleman & Goodman, 2015; Cholewa, 2015; Christian et al., 2017; Engberg & Gilbert, 2013; Hurwitz & Howell, 2014; Stephan & Rosenbaum, 2013). In the studies that used a regression analysis tool, many of the variables were items that, while defined in the study, could be defined differently in other studies. Similar to the studies in the low socioeconomic section of this literature review, some of those variables were definitions related to income and poverty measures, high school college-going resources, and whether or not the counselor in the studies were at primary or secondary schools (e.g., see Cholewa, 2015; Engberg & Gilbert, 2013; Hill, 2011; Holland, 2015).

There was one article that used a mixed methods approach. Bodenhorn et al. (2010) used descriptive statistics on counselors but also seemingly recognized that conducting research on a multi-faceted role like a school counselor provided the opportunity to utilize qualitative methods to provide rich, thick description on a particular aspect of the role. Bodenhorn et al. also focused on how counselors viewed their own jobs and how that influenced student success.

Qualitative analysis was the preferred research method for many of the article authors (e.g., see Alger & Luke, 2015; Deslonde & Becerra, 2018; Hill, 2011; Holland, 2015; Johnson et al., 2016; Savitz-Romer, 2012; Shamsuddin, 2016). While it was unclear what epistemological lens many of the researchers used, several of them used grounded theory (e.g., see Alger & Luke, 2015; Johnson et al., 2016; Shamsuddin, 2016) or phenomenology (e.g., see Savitz-Romer, 2012) to guide their research. Altogether, the articles created a shared foundation of knowledge to analyze how counselors are perceived within the education system.

Common theories and conceptual frameworks. The theories and frameworks utilized within the school counselor portion of the literature review often framed the counselor through a student success and postsecondary decision-making framework (e.g., see Engberg & Gilbert, 2013; Deslonde & Becerra, 2018; Hill, 2011; McKillip et al., 2012). Some articles focused on social capital (e.g., see Bryan et al., 2011; Holland, 2015). Bodenhorn et al. (2010) framed the school counselor through a self-efficacy lens. Overall, school counselors operate within school systems. The school system this literature review seeks to analyze is the career academy model.

The Career Academy Model in High Schools

The first section of the literature review discussed low socioeconomic students and their challenges. The second section discussed the school counselor role. This section focuses on the career academy model in high schools. There were three themes as a result of the research on the career academy model in high schools. The themes are: 1) the modern career academy, 2) the elements of its success, 3) and the academic and career benefits for students.

The theme of the modern career academy focuses on historical usage of career academies and the new national consensus on their renewed purpose. The theme regarding the elements of successful career academies analyzes the legal authority under which career academies operate, the career academy organizational structure, and the significant partnerships critical to career academy success. Finally, the academic and career benefits theme reviews the specific benefits realized within the high school system and how career academies can be a gain for postsecondary career pathways and benefits.

The modern career academy. Historically, career academies have been a part of a larger career and technical educational system in the United States. There has emerged, however, a

national consensus on what career academies are and their renewed purpose within a diversifying education and workforce system.

Historical usage. Vocational education through apprenticeships have been a part of education since the Industrial Revolution; vocational training in general has occurred since the Middle Ages (Lanford & Maruco, 2018). Career academies were started to deal with poor performance among high school students (Fletcher & Cox, 2012). This was the expressed purpose in 1969 for the first school in the United States labeled as a career academy, Thomas Edison High School in Philadelphia, which was a school known for high student dropout rates (Lanford & Maruco, 2018). Career academies were also designed to provide rigorous coursework alongside a career pathway, with the goal of getting a diverse student population to be in a socially and academically supportive environment (Dixon, Cotner, Wilson, & Borman, 2011). California was the first state to set up a statewide system for career academies (Lanford & Maruco, 2018).

Career academies were initially conceived to prevent students from becoming drop outs in high school but have since shifted to focus on getting students to attend postsecondary education (What Works Clearinghouse, 2015). This shift has created a new student demographic within career academies, as Fletcher and Cox (2012) explained that "while career academies were originally designed to boost the skills of students who needed academic assistance, the opportunity has been seized by academically robust students" (p. 6). This has created a new national consensus regarding the renewed purpose of career academies.

National consensus and renewed purpose. According to the NCAC (2018), career academies are in roughly 7,000 schools and reach one million students, and "their impact has been felt from an academic, economic, workforce development, and social perspective,

especially for at-risk youth. Career academies are designed to prepare students for both college and careers" (p. 1). Career academies are also programs that reflect the common sentiment among both researchers and policymakers that it is important in a global, competitive economy to develop effective pathways for students regarding college and career opportunities (Malin & Hackman, 2017). Career academies have shifted to focus on academic rigor as opposed to only expanding learning opportunities for underperforming students (Fletcher & Cox, 2012). Dixon et al. (2011) explained why this shift may have developed:

> Career academies also are designed to integrate career-centered and academic coursework and to offer opportunities for work-based experiences through local business partnerships. The goal of the career academy model is to prepare students for education at the community college or university levels, and/or for the workforce, in a broad, locally relevant career field. (p. 207)

There is a collective understanding within the United States that education institutions and the business community have a vested interest in working together for workforce development (Malin & Hackmann, 2019).

Career pathways help students translate classroom curriculum into jobs through internships, while also putting students in a position to improve future income and improve their social standing (Hall, 2015). Lanford and Maruco (2018) explained that "career academies, as small learning communities, can offer valuable social capital through amplified teacher involvement, increased student engagement, and personalized academic support" (p. 619). The main focus of a career academy is to get students interested in school, ensure a successful transition to college, and increase their employability (Fletcher & Cox, 2012). This multi-pronged focus allows career academes to remain designed to get students who are often

disengaged to become interested again (Hall, 2015). In urban settings in particular, career academies are often designed to build a clear connection between school and work, with the explicit goal of lowering dropout rates while also developing work-related skills (Page, 2012). Career academies are a cross-sector opportunity for students to become both college ready and career ready (Malin & Hackmann, 2019). Page (2012) described this in detail:

> In urban settings, concern persists regarding high rates of dropout, low rates of continuation to college, and low rates of students completing high school with skills sufficient for today's workplace. The career academy model seeks to build healthier school–work connections, through which students can better understand the relationship between current educational experiences and future workplace opportunities. (Page, 2012, p. 103)

Career academies are a particular type of career and technical education opportunity for high school students who seek to specialize in a career pathway in a specific industry (Dougherty, 2016). Career academies have particular elements that have contributed to their success.

Elements of success. The legal authority, organizational structure, and significant partnerships within career academies are each important elements of success.

Legal authority. Vocational education is typically funded at the state and local level, but its orientation has been shaped by federal policy, starting with the Smith-Hughes Act of 1917 and on through to the Carl D. Perkins Act reauthorization in 2006 (Dougherty, 2016). It was the reauthorization of the Perkins Act in 2006 that cemented the modern structure:

> The Carl D. Perkins Career and Technical Act (2006) provides federal funds to support the skills development of students enrolled in CTE programs of study (POS) that are intended to provide increased career preparation and postsecondary access for high

school graduates. Ideally, POS offerings reflect considered planning, include meaningful partnerships with higher education institutions and local businesses, and promote effective transitions across educational levels and/or to the student's chosen career. (Malin & Hackman, 2017, p. 55)

Many career academies also receive federal support through the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (What Works Clearinghouse, 2015). Regarding the Perkins Act reauthorization, "the law re-conceptualized CTE by requiring that academic and technical content be linked, with the goal of readying students either to enter the labor market directly or be well prepared for additional education and training" (Dougherty, 2016, p. 9). Perkins also purposes to develop deep connections within the economy by linking high school education to postsecondary education and career opportunities (Hall, 2015).

Career academies have also developed their own standards. The NCAC, consisting of nine career and technical education organizations, organized the National Standards of Practice for Career Academies (The National Career Academy Coalition, 2018). The NCAC stated that "the career theme can be any of the 16 in the national Career Clusters taxonomy or variations on these" (The National Career Academy Coalition, 2018, p. 2). Those 16 clusters include: Health Science; Information Technology; Law, Public Safety and Security; Education and Training; Hospitality and Tourism; Human Services; Marketing, Sales, and Service; Business, Management, and Administration; Finance; Science, Tech, Engineering and Math; Agriculture, Food, and Natural Resources; Architecture and Construction; Arts, A/V Technology and Communication; Government and Public Administration; Manufacturing; and Transportation, Distribution and Logistics (Evan et al., 2012). The legal guidelines and NCAC standards have helped solidify the organizational structure for career academies.

Organizational structure. What Works Clearinghouse (2015) explained that career academies have three elements to them:

> First, Career Academies are small learning communities in which clusters of students share several classes each year and teachers collaborate around student needs. Second, Career Academies have a focused curriculum with a career theme relevant to local industry and economic needs. Third, Career Academies develop partnerships with employers, higher education institutions, and the community. Participants in these partnerships advise on curriculum related to occupations, speak in classes, host field trips, provide financial or other support, and serve as student mentors. (p. 2)

The community leaders involved in the partnerships in career academies are often encouraged to participate in curriculum formation, as well as develop internship opportunities and be mentors (Lanford & Maruco, 2018). Depending on the student population this could be influential, as Kemple and Wilner (2008) found that "the student populations in Career Academies tend to reflect the ethnic, gender, and socioeconomic characteristics of their host high schools" (p. 24).

Lanford and Maruco (2018) found that developing a familial atmosphere amongst the students in the cohort, as well as the teachers who teach them, can be important for success within career academies. Within cohorts, Dixon et al. (2011) found that one of the most important elements of a career academy model was grouping cohorts by grade-level so students could move through academy coursework together. Career academies that focus on ninth grade students are sometimes in their own building, or in schools that have a large student population (Styron & Peasant, 2010). MacCallumore and Sparapani (2010) explained that "freshman academies are structured to give each student more individual attention" (p. 451). Still, states have focused their career academies outside of the ninth grade. In the California model, the

academy is for 10th grade through 12th grade students, and 50% of the total student population must come from an at-risk population, a state specific criterion set by California (Lanford & Maruco, 2018).

Career academies are also a financial investment. In 2004, the estimated cost of a career academy program was "$600 per pupil more than a district's average per-pupil expenditure" (What Works Clearinghouse, 2015, p. 2). Career academies cost more per pupil than traditional high schools (Lanford & Maruco, 2018). In California, the career academy model has specific pathways to college, as students complete a specific coursework sequence that generates admission to a California public university and a high school diploma (Lanford & Maruco, 2018). Hall (2015) goes into greater detail on why the California model could be effective:

> A pathway should include an introduction to career opportunities in a region's high-wage, high-demand employment sectors; basic skills needed to succeed in postsecondary education and training; transition to entry-level skills training; internships and employment; continuous upgrade training; and social supports throughout, as necessary. (p. 243-244)

Teachers play an important role in implementing this model, as "teachers have been expected to work together to integrate curriculum across academic and career-based subject areas, discuss individual student progress, and develop projects and work-based opportunities relevant to the academy's career field" (Dixon, et al., 2011, p. 209). Teachers are important to the infrastructure of career academies, as they can create practical classroom assignments that offer ties to real-world examples of the industry theme within that particular academy (Lanford & Maruco, 2018). Building an infrastructure to support the career academy model in a high school is important, as Malin and Hackmann (2017) found in their analysis of an urban school district in the Midwest

that "at the school-district level, the position of director for college and career readiness was created, with oversight for the academy model, and academy coach positions have been created for each of the district's high schools" (p. 64).

The high school counselor is also important to the career academy model and is explicitly included in the designated staff necessary to be trained on how to create a supportive atmosphere, be an authority on career and college opportunities for the particular academy theme, and the processes necessary for a career academy to thrive (NCAC, 2018). Developing significant partnerships are important for career academy success.

Significant partnerships. Career academies are successful when they have clear partnership benefits for all partners, including students, teachers, employers, and postsecondary organizations (Malin & Hackmann, 2017). Lanford and Maruco (2018) found that career academies could work well if teachers had existing, deep relationships with local industry that yielded internships and other experiential opportunities for students. Malin and Hackmann (2019) expanded on this, saying that "local business and civic officials possess insights about workforce trends and relevant knowledge/skills that can inform educators' programming designs, ensuring the curriculum is relevant and that students graduate with skills needed in the local workforce" (Malin & Hackmann, 2019, p. 190). Local school and district context matter for career academy success (Dixon et al., 2011). Having clear community and school leaders who will champion the cause and provide financial and other tangible resources towards the effort is important for career academy success (Malin & Hackmann, 2017). Still, recognizing the benefits that a strong academic and career experience that a career academy can provide is important.

Academic and career benefits for students. Career academies offer benefits that are realized during the high school experience, as well as benefits that contribute to postsecondary career pathways and significant career benefits.

Benefits realized within the high school system. In 2010, there were over 1,500 career academies all across the United States, with nearly 130 of them focusing explicitly on ninth grade only (Styron & Peasant, 2010). Freshman academies have shown success, including improvements in student behavior and attendance, as well as parental involvement and teacher morale (MacCallumore & Sparapani, 2010). Career academies can also help improve grades and encourage higher rates of course completion (Malin & Hackmann, 2019). Styron and Peasant (2010) found that there was a statistically significant difference between ninth grade students in the career academy compared to their peers in the traditional high school, with the career academy students doing better on Algebra I and Biology I standardized tests. Schools in Kentucky that implemented a freshman academy model saw gains in student academic exams and reductions in behavioral problems (MacCallumore & Sparapani, 2010). Students in career academies can experience more success than students in traditional schools because they remain "with the same teachers through multiple grade levels and experienced more hands-on, real-life learning activities, integrated instruction, and cooperative learning methodologies" (Styron & Peasant, 2010, p. 5).

Those benefits can help prepare students for postsecondary opportunities, but this is not a guarantee. The research on whether or not graduation improved among students in career academies is mixed, with some saying that students did graduate at higher rates and others saying there was no difference at all (Dixon et al., 2011). Kemple and Wilner (2008) stated that "overall, the Career Academies had no impact (positive or negative) on postsecondary education

enrollment and attainment rates" (p. 29), but "increased investments in career-related experiences during high school can improve students' postsecondary labor market prospects" (p. 37). Those increased investments, though, can lead to postsecondary career pathways and significant achievements.

Postsecondary career pathways and significant career benefits. High school degrees do not produce the same level of job they did in the 1980s and 1990s, and in many cases the real wages are actually lower (Page, 2012). Likewise, high school diplomas alone are no longer providing pathways to middle-class careers, and not all students see a pathway to a four-year institution as desirable, but a postsecondary credential of some kind is becoming increasing important (Malin & Hackmann, 2019). Career academies, however, can offer a real, long lasting effect on economic and academic success for student participants (Page, 2012). Using 2006 dollars adjusted for inflation, Kemple and Wilner (2008) found that students in career academies in urban school districts earned nearly $17,000 more on average than the students chosen for, but not randomly selected, for the career academy. Even so, signs of inequity remained:

> Individuals who were older for their grade and those who were raised by a single mother realized lower earnings, on average. In addition, those with higher baseline academic performance (as measure by GPA) realized higher labor market earnings, on average. (Page, 2012, p. 123)

And yet, the Coalition for Evidence-Based Policy said in 2014 that career academies are a benefit to society in a sizable way, helping students improve noncognitive and workplace skills through real world opportunities and internships sponsored by the business community (Malin & Hackmann, 2019). Lanford and Maruco (2018) expounded upon this belief:

> Benefits are largely attributable to the personalized support that enables students to build

> confidence, develop their academic skills, clarify their personal and potential job-related interests, and enjoy a multiyear relationship with committed teachers. For this reason, it is reasonable to surmise the gains in attendance, exam scores, and graduation rates that have been observed at career academies may be replicated by similarly sized academic communities, especially if they provide equivalent levels of supplementary tutoring and personal support. (p. 641)

Career academies, though, can offer apprenticeships, work-based and technology preparatory programs and partnerships, and co-operative education (Hall, 2015). Still, those offerings do not guarantee success for all students. Many career academy programs that focus on the skills gap in the workforce in the United States offer mixed results, especially for underrepresented students (Malin & Hackman, 2017).

Real world application and sense of belonging have been additional benefits from the career academy model because it makes the content relevant and builds a social network for participants (Dixon et al., 2011). Career academies, often clustered, are becoming more economically diverse as career and job opportunities become more complex (Hall, 2015). According to Dixon et al. (2011), "career academy students were more likely to have had diverse and relevant work-and community service-related experiences, particularly those consistent with the academy's career theme" (p. 210). Career academies students are more likely to be employed longer, work more hours, and make higher wages than the students who qualified, but were not randomly selected, for a career academy (Kemple & Wilner, 2008). Dixon et al. (2011) explained why this might be the case:

> Compared to 26.5 % of non-academy high school graduates, 35.2% of career academy graduates reported that their academy facilitated their understanding of the relationship

between work and education; compared to 44.8% of non-academy graduates, 55.1% of career academy graduates reported perceiving that their academies prepared them for their current or last job or educational experiences. (p. 210)

Common methodologies. The methodologies discussed in this section are specific to the articles reviewed for the career academy portion of the literature review. Some articles did not identify detailed methods for how the researcher developed the scholarship produced within the study (e.g., see Hall, 2015; MacCallumore & Sparapani, 2010; What Works Clearinghouse, 2015). Of the ones that did, some researchers used quantitative methods. The data were gathered from career academies and large school districts and the authors used variables regarding student achievement and postsecondary success (e.g., see Dougherty, 2016; Kemple & Wilner, 2008; Page, 2012; Styron & Peasant, 2010). In the studies that used a regression analysis tool, many of the income and poverty variables were items that, while defined in the study, could be defined differently in other studies. No articles used a mixed methods approach.

Qualitative analysis was the preferred research method for many of the article authors (e.g., see Dixon et al., 2011; Fletcher & Cox, 2012; Lanford & Maruco, 2018; Malin & Hackmann, 2017; Malin & Hackmann, 2019). While it was unclear what epistemological lens many of the researchers used, several of them used case study (e.g., see Dixon et al., 2011; Lanford & Maruco, 2018; Malin & Hackmann, 2017; Malin & Hackmann, 2019) or phenomenology (e.g., see Fletcher & Cox, 2012) to guide their research. Altogether, the articles created a shared foundation of knowledge and framework to analyze how career academies can influence student postsecondary outcomes.

Common theories and conceptual frameworks. The common theories and frameworks used within the career academy portion of the literature review often framed the career academy

model through a leadership or social capital framework (e.g., see Lanford & Maruco, 2018; Malin & Hackmann, 2017; Malin & Hackmann, 2019; Page, 2012). One article focused on the NCAC National Standards of Practice (see Dixon et al., 2011), while another focused on the Kemple and Snipes (2000) career academy conceptual model (see Fletcher & Cox, 2012).

Theoretical Framework

The research on low-income students, high school counselors, and career academies uses a variety of methods and frameworks for analysis. In order to review them in conjunction with one another, this research applies a theoretical framework that is specific to the context of the study, focusing on the social capital high school counselors utilize to influence low-income student postsecondary career pathways within the lens of the local career academy model.

As shown in figure 1, the theoretical framework for this study is Lin's (1999) theory of social capital, viewed in tandem with the JCPS rubric for freshman academies and the JCPS freshman academy theory of action (JCPS, 2018c; JCPS, 2018d), which were built from the NCAC career academy standards (NCAC, 2018). Within the freshman career academy rubric for success, there are three objectives. The first focuses on a transformational school experience, the second is about student support programs, and the third focuses on career development and the personal skills of students (JCPS, 2018c). Within the first objective, JCPS explicitly mentions freshman academy counselors as a core feature, explaining that an effective counselor is wholly dedicated to the freshman and physically located within the academy building (JCPS, 2018c).

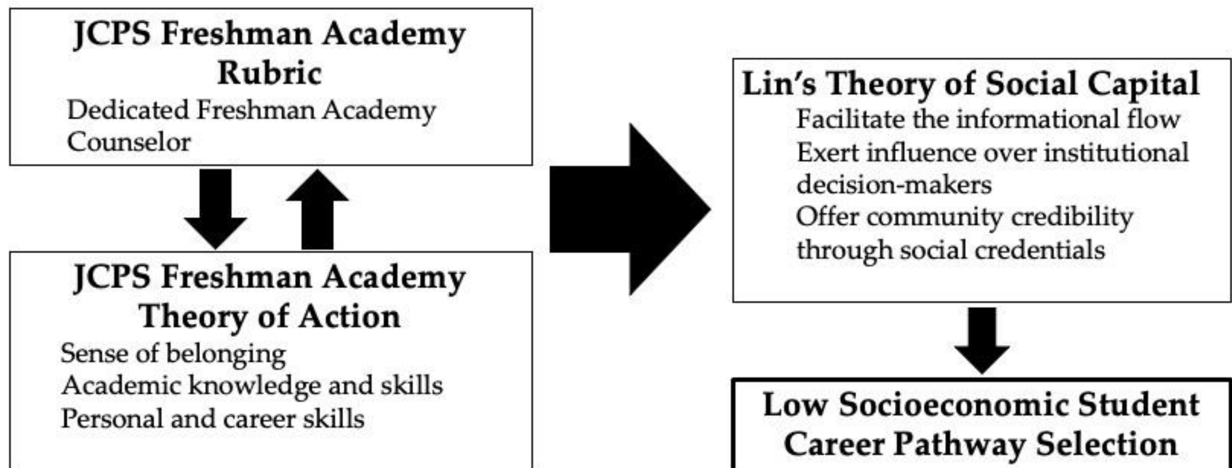

Figure 1. Theoretical framework.

Within the JCPS theory of action, there are three specific areas of focus where freshman academies can help with student development: 1) sense of belonging, 2) academic knowledge and skills, and 3) personal and career skills (JCPS, 2018d). Counselors have proven to help develop a sense of belonging with students (Cholewa et al., 2015), academic knowledge and skills (Bodenhorn et al., 2010; Paolini, 2019), and personal and career skills (Bryan et al., 2015; Deslonde & Becerra, 2018). This framework, through the lens of Lin (1999), will help assess how freshman academy counselors utilize social capital to influence low-income students' college and career pathways.

Lin (1999) said that social capital can "enhance the outcome of actions" (p. 31) in three specific ways. First, social capital is key in facilitating the informational flow. This is because "in the usual imperfect market situations, social ties located in certain strategic locations and/or hierarchical positions (and thus better informed on market needs and demands) can provide an individual with useful information about opportunities and choices otherwise not available" (Lin, 1999, p. 31). Second, social capital can exert influence over institutional decision-makers:

> Some social ties, due to their strategic locations (e.g., structural holes) and positions (e.g., authority or supervisory capacities), also carry more valued resources and exercise greater power (e.g., greater asymmetry in dependence by these agents), in organizational agents' decision-making. Thus, "putting in a word" carries a certain weight in the decision making process regarding an individual. (Lin, 1999, p. 31)

Third, social capital can offer credibility regarding social credentials with a community:

> Social tie resources, and their acknowledged relationships to the individual, may be conceived by the organization or its agents as certifications of the individual's *social credentials,* some of which reflect the individual's accessibility to resources through social networks and relations -- his/her social capital. "Standing behind" the individual by these ties reassures the organization (and its agents) that the individual can provide "added" resources beyond the individual's personal capital, some of which may be useful to the organization. (Lin, 1999, p. 31)

Counselors can also provide social capital for low-income students (Shamsuddin, 2016). As explained in the earlier literature review, social capital as a framework is used frequently regarding low-income students (e.g., see A. B. Cox, 2016; Holland & Farmer-Hinton, 2009; Hallett & Venegas, 2011; Murillo et al., 2017; Relles, 2017) and high school counselors (e.g., see Bryan et al., 2011; Holland, 2015). Capital itself is a broad concept, as Lin (1999) explained in detail, stating "fundamentally, capital remains a surplus value and represents an investment with expected returns" (p. 29). From a social lens, Lin suggests that social capital in essentially a relational investment, where a return on that investment is expected. This return is based on having access to social networks, and the resources embedded within them (Lin, 1999). Given Lin's perspective on social capital, and this study's focus on both low-income students and high

school counselors with regard to social capital in a career academy high school, Lin's framework is appropriate to use.

Focusing on high school counselor social capital narrows the lens so the research questions guiding this study, which focus on knowledge, perception, and resources regarding counselor influence on low-income student decision-making, are analyzed clearly through a social capital lens. Mapping the Lin (1999) framework onto the localized career academy model (JCPS, 2018c; JCPS, 2018d) ensures that the analysis is restricted to the career academy system explicitly. As described earlier, the stated problem this research seeks to address is that low socioeconomic students who lack access to career and college opportunities could end up living a lower quality of life than their peers who are not considered low socioeconomic students. Career academies can potentially change this narrative by providing access to career and college opportunities that can close gaps regarding postsecondary pathways and financial prospects (Kemple & Wilner, 2008; Page, 2012).

Chapter Three: Methodology

The purpose of this study was to understand how high school counselors can influence low socioeconomic students' postsecondary decision-making within the context of a career academy high school model in an urban setting. This study is qualitative and used a case study research design. The theoretical framework is Lin's (1999) theory of social capital, viewed through the JCPS rubric for freshman academies and the JCPS freshman academy theory of action (JCPS, 2018c; JCPS 2018d), which were developed from the NCAC career academy standards (NCAC, 2018). This chapter outlines the research questions this study explored and provides a detailed explanation on the methodological approach and why both qualitative analysis and case study design were chosen. Next, this chapter discusses the sampling approach, the study setting and participant selection, as well as how the data were collected and analyzed with validity and trustworthiness. This chapter ends with the positionality of the researcher and potential limitations within the study.

Research Questions

The research questions this study explored include:

1) Using the knowledge available regarding college and career opportunities, how do freshman academy counselors influence low socioeconomic students' career pathway selection?
2) How do freshman academy counselors' perceptions of college and career opportunities for low socioeconomic students influence low socioeconomic students' career pathway selection?

Methodology and Epistemological Approach

This study used qualitative methodology. A qualitative methodology was chosen because qualitative analysis allows for an in-depth description of the data collected to better understand meaning making (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Qualitative research is "how people make sense of their world and the experiences they have in the world" (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p.15). Merriam and Tisdell (2016) also suggest that qualitative researchers are interested in the meaning people construct within their own experiences; this is why a constructivist epistemology was selected for this study. Constructivism is a worldview described as the belief that a single reality cannot be observed and "reality is socially constructed" (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 9), while epistemology is what can be known and the relationship of the knower to the known information (Hatch, 2002). Therefore, a constructivist epistemological lens attempts to gain a comprehensive understanding of the focus of the study from as many perspectives involved as possible.

This approach was useful for this research because how a counselor experiences their role within their unique environment and constructed reality plays a role in how they interact with and influence their students' decision-making (Bodenhorn et al., 2010). Capturing an iteration of how a counselor experiences their role while influencing students' decision-making within this study is an example of the very nature of making sense of the world through experiences, which is what a constructivist approach seeks to do (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). A research design equipped for this type of reconstruction analysis of a phenomenon is the case study (Baxter & Jack, 2017).

Research Design

The research design used for this study was case study, a qualitative approach where the investigator analyzes at least one bounded system over time through detailed, rich data collection involving multiple information sources such as documents, interviews, or archival records (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Case study "facilitates exploration of a phenomenon within its context using a variety of data sources" (Baxter & Jack, 2008, p. 544). Case study research analyzes a case, which has been described as the unit being analyzed within the research (Baxter & Jack, 2008). A case can be an individual, a process, a decision, or other phenomena (Baxter & Jack, 2008). The case in this study was District One, an urban school district in the southern part of the United States. I examined the process of how freshman academy counselors can influence low socioeconomic students' selection of a career pathway during their freshman year as a member of their freshman academy.

Yin (2018) explained that the three elements that determine when it is appropriate to use a case study include when the researcher is answering a "how" question, the researcher does not exert control over behavioral events, and the phenomenon in question is contemporary. These elements applied to this study. Regarding the "how" research question, this study sought to understand how freshman high school counselors, in a career academy high school model, influence low socioeconomic students' postsecondary decision-making. The research focused on how freshman career academy counselors are influential, and the study did not introduce elements that changed the behavior of the case, meeting the second element. To meet the third element, the study analyzed a contemporary issue, which is the decision of a freshman high school student to select a career pathway, ultimately impacting their postsecondary opportunities.

As a research design, case study must be bounded in order to determine the limit and scope of the research (Baxter & Jack, 2008). For this study, the boundary was the group of freshman academy counselors in freshman academies within high schools in District One that have a majority of students who are on F/RL. The National Center for Education Statistics suggested that F/RL is regularly used as a proxy for poverty among school aged students (National Center for Education Statistics, 2015). Because this study focused on high school counselors influence on low-income students, F/RL was the best available metric within District One public data to serve as an indicator for the schools on which to focus.

All case studies must be bound, but research questions with varying purposes call for different types of case study designs to be used (Baxter & Jack, 2008). This study employed a single case study design. A single case study can be a case study that analyzes a singular phenomenon, or a single group experiencing the same phenomenon (Baxter & Jack, 2008). This study analyzed a group of freshman academy counselors in District One. Further, this single case study was an instrumental case study, which Baxter and Jack (2008) described in depth as a research design that can accomplish more than only understanding a phenomenon:

> It provides insight into an issue or helps to refine a theory. The case is of secondary interest; it plays a supportive role, facilitating our understanding of something else. The case is often looked at in depth, its contexts scrutinized, its ordinary activities detailed, and because it helps the researcher pursue the external interest. (p. 549)

As discussed earlier, the identified problem in this study was that low socioeconomic students often do not have the same postsecondary opportunities as their peers. In the District One career academy model, students select their career pathway during their freshman year, making this decision the effective high school event that sets them on their postsecondary trajectory. During

the literature review, I found high school counselors as able to provide the social capital to potentially mitigate the differences in opportunities between low socioeconomic students and their peers. Therefore, the process of how freshman academy counselors in District One influence low socioeconomic students career pathway selection is the secondary interest that this research sought to use to understand the identified problem.

Qualitative studies using a case study design do not always have propositions, but they often can in order to focus the research even more. Propositions are guiding statements to focus the researcher and are often taken from the literature (Baxter & Jack, 2008). Baxter and Jack explained that “when a case study proposal includes specific propositions it increases the likelihood that the researcher will be able to place limits on the scope of the study and increase the feasibility of completing the project” (p. 551). In order to guide the scope of the research, this study had a proposition centered on its theoretical framework. The proposition for this study was that high school counselors act as a form of social capital for low socioeconomic students regarding postsecondary decision-making (Bryan et al., 2011; Hallett & Venegas, 2011; Holland & Farmer-Hinton, 2009; Holland, 2015; McDonough, 2005; Murillo et al., 2017; Relles, 2017). This proposition allowed the research to be conducted in a way that analyzed the data through the theoretical lens, while keeping true to the instrumental single case study research design.

Setting, Participants, and Sampling Approach

The setting for this study was District One, an urban school district in the southern part of the United States. The case was further bounded by focusing on freshman academy counselors within career academy schools that have majority F/RL students. A freshman academy high school was defined as each of the schools listed on District One’s public website entering the 2019-2020 academic school year.

The study utilized criterion-based sampling, meaning that each case met "some criterion; useful for quality assurance" (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p. 159). Of the eight participants, five identified as female and three identified as male. Five of the participants identified as White and three identified as Black. Their schools F/RL percentages ranged from 63% to 84%. With regard to experience as a counselor at their respective schools, the years of experience spanned 1.5 years to nine years. The participants were given pseudonyms for anonymity.

Data Collection

The data collected for this case study were for the purpose of answering the research questions regarding how freshman academy counselors use their knowledge, perceptions, and resources regarding postsecondary opportunities to influence low socioeconomic students career pathway decisions. An important aspect of case study research is that it utilizes multiple sources for collection of data (Baxter & Jack, 2008). This study collected data in three ways: interviews, archival records, and documentation.

Yin (2018) stated interviews are an important source of data collection in case studies because they can explain key events and provide insight into the participants thoughts and perspectives. That was an essential function of this study, given its focus on the process of how high school counselors as social capital influence low socioeconomic student decision making. Before interviews began, I sent an email to the school principal for each potential participant (Appendix F), asking for their permission to reach out to their freshman academy counselor. Once I gained permission, I sent an email to each freshman academy counselor (Appendix A) asking for them to agree to participate. Within the email was an attachment with greater detail as to what the study was and what the interview would be about (Appendix B). Once the counselor agreed to be interviewed, I scheduled an in-person meeting with the counselor at their school.

The interviews were semi-structured, nearly hour-long interviews. The interviews were recorded using the Otter AI ™ software; I also took notes on my computer throughout each interview. I stored the interview notes and Otter AI ™ transcription in an electronic file folder within my laptop; I have a file for each participant. Prior to conducting the interview, I asked participants to fill out an informational sheet (Appendix C) in order to capture demographic information. During the interview, I asked each participant a set of 13 questions that related to how their knowledge, perceptions, and resources regarding postsecondary opportunities can influence low income students career pathway decisions (Appendix D).

Data were also collected through the retrieval of archival records, "often taking the form of data files" (Yin, 2018, p. 117). The data files used as archival records came from a District One survey, which assesses how students, parents, and staff members feel about school climate. Specifically, there were two questions included from this survey. Those questions target college readiness and adult support for student postsecondary success. Yin (2018) suggests that data collected through archival records can be used in conjunction with the other data sources. I did that in this study, specifically to provide a richer understanding of counselor influence on freshmen career pathway decision-making (Appendix D).

Finally, documentation is important, because it can "corroborate and augment evidence from other sources" (Yin, 2018, p. 115). Analyzing documents regarding how high school counselors utilize and perceive postsecondary resources for low socioeconomic students, viewed in tandem with archival records and interviews on the same topic, was a key part of this study. I asked the participants for a copy of any and all documents that they fill out or directly give and explain to students that deal with career pathway selection. Upon receipt of those copies, I took notes and wrote my reflections on my laptop, utilizing a document analysis sheet derived from

the research questions and theoretical framework (Appendix E). After this data collection, if there were gaps regarding the process counselors used to influence low socioeconomic students in their college and career pathways, I reached out to the participants for a follow up interview. If a follow up interview was necessary, the questions for the follow up interviews were outlined in the documentation sheet (Appendix E). I stored those documents and reflections within the corresponding school-based electronic file folder on my computer.

In accordance with the guidelines of the Bellarmine University and District One regarding the protection of human participants, prior to any data collection a request for review was submitted to the Bellarmine University and District One's Institutional Review Boards (IRB) for approval to interview and observe the participants for this study. After receiving IRB approval, participant recruitment and data collection began.

Data Analysis

Yin (2018) describes a data analysis strategy for qualitative research as "working your data from the 'ground up'" (p. 169). This is the process of reviewing the data collected thoroughly, potentially finding "a useful concept or two" (Yin, 2018, p. 169). Creswell and Poth (2018) describe a similar process, stating how "one analytic strategy would be to identify issues within each case and then look for common themes that transcend the cases" (p. 100). Yin (2018) explained this strategy could be useful for grounded theory or case study research, particularly if it is used in conjunction with quantitative data collection. Some of the archival reports that were collected for this study are quantitative data, which made this strategy appropriate for this case study. Furthermore, grounded theory is often used to produce new theoretical approaches or frameworks for future research (Creswell & Poth, 2018). An instrumental case study, as explained earlier in this chapter, may be conducted similarly. I conducted this instrumental case

study in that manner and therefore used techniques typically used for grounded theory studies for my analysis.

The data were analyzed through open coding, which is "developing categories of information" (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p. 203) that can then be developed into interconnected categories. This approach divided the collected data into categories, which I then couched into broader themes and displayed them as general findings (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). The purpose of this coding process was to answer the research questions asked at the beginning of the study. To determine what ought to be included in the coding process, the information had to have been both interesting and relevant for the study, even down to the smallest bit of information (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

The data analysis was based on the data gathered through the interviews conducted, archival records reviewed, and documentation collected. I recorded the interviews, transcribed them, and then used the open coding method to categorize the relevant information. The document analysis sheet was coded using the open coding method as well. When necessary, I conducted follow-up interviews with participants to ask clarifying questions regarding the analyzed documents. That information was also coded. I then took the information gathered and coded through the open coding method and utilized the axial coding method. Axial coding allows the researcher to build "a story that connects the categories" (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p. 203). I used axial coding to develop a narrative based on the themes that emerged from the axial coding process.

Validity and trustworthiness criteria. To ensure quality within research designs, the researcher must be concerned with validity, reliability, and trustworthiness (Yin, 2018). Validity

is recognized differently, depending on if the validity is either internal or external (Merriam & Associates, 2002; Yin, 2018).

Merriam and Associates (2002) view internal validity as determining how congruent the researcher's findings are with reality. Since reality is, in part, determined by the researcher's epistemology (Creswell & Poth, 2018), it is important internal validity be checked for quality. A strategy for determining internal validity, thereby building richer data analysis, is triangulation (Merriam & Associates, 2002). Triangulation is utilizing varying forms of data collection, such as interviews, records, and documentation, to overcome any shortcomings from the researcher in collecting and interpreting the data (Merriam & Associates; Shenton, 2004). To do this, the document analysis took place after interviews were conducted and was used to augment the constructed reality developed through the interview and archival records. External validity is defined as "showing whether and how a case study's findings can be generalized" (Yin, 2018, p. 42). By generalization, Yin (2018) is referring to the extent to which case study can be useful for analytic generalization, not the traditional statistical generalization used in quantitative research:

> Your experience will be far different from simply applying the numeric result emanating from the use of some formulaic procedure, as in making statistical generalizations. However, the implications for your analytic generalization can lead to greater insight about the "how" and "why" questions that you posted at the outset of your case study. (p. 38)

Reliability within qualitative research is described by Shenton (2004) as dependability, because the conditions of a qualitative study do not allow for direct replication, as is the purpose of traditional quantitative research reliability techniques. For the qualitative researcher, different approaches to ensure dependability are necessary. Those approaches include a detailed

explanation of the research design utilized in the study, a thorough review of the data collection process in the field, and a full appraisal of the process after the data has been collected (Shenton, 2004). For this study, I have provided a detailed description of the research design and data collection process, as well as a post-data collection analysis.

Trustworthiness has been defined using four general concepts: credibility, confirmability, transferability, and dependability (Shenton, 2004). Credibility, which is equivalent to internal validity (Merriam & Associates, 2002; Shenton, 2004) and transferability, the equivalent of external validity (Merriam & Associates, 2002; Shenton, 2004) have been addressed within this study, as has dependability. Confirmability is defined by Shenton (2004) as "the qualitative investigator's comparable concern to objectivity" (p. 72). Shenton explains that confirmability is designed to ensure the reported findings reflect the experiences and perspectives of the participants, not the researcher. For this, triangulation was utilized. Additionally, in order to ensure research bias was checked throughout the study and the findings were trustworthy, member checking was performed in order to capture the true sentiment and perspective of the participants. Member checking is allowing the participants to review the findings in their own words, creating separation between the bias of the interpretation of the researcher and maintaining the independence of the participant's experience (Shenton, 2004). Finally, in order to promote trustworthiness, the background and positionality of the researcher has been included in this study so that any bias or perspective may be reflexively and transparently available to the reader, as that is a fundamental aspect of qualitative research (Shenton, 2004).

Positionality Statement

I am a doctoral student who is employed to primary advocate for higher education policy in Kentucky. I grew up in Kentucky and higher education is very important to my family. My

father was a professor and academic dean for the entirety of his professional career; my mother, my siblings and I all have higher education degrees in Kentucky that have led to great success. I want every family to have that opportunity and I believe that can be achieved through an education system that provides access to affordable, high quality education opportunities for every student.

My bias in this study is reflected in my worldview: I believe policy, built from a constructive lens, can positively impact economically marginalized people. I also recognize that my political philosophy, limited government conservatism, will impact the formulation of my questions, findings, and recommendations. I also have a personal connection to the school district where I seek to conduct this study; a relative currently serves as a teacher in the school district and up until recently, was a high school teacher in one of the schools where I collected data.

Due to personal and negative experiences as a Black male who received an education in a predominately White institution for the entirety of my education, I have become somewhat distrustful of traditional education systems. Although my overall educational experience has been overwhelmingly positive, a couple distinctly painful memories linger. I know how significant an individual teacher, counselor, or educator can be in a child's life, particularly students who may come from a racially or economically disadvantaged background. As a result, I have an unyielding belief that every child deserves a quality education. I also have a personal commitment to end generational poverty in the United States. I believe focusing in on a particularly marginalized community will best achieve that goal. For this study, the community I focused on most was students from a low socioeconomic status. I was interested in this population because the potential for great impact is reflected in the research.

Research shows high school counselors are significant for low socioeconomic students when determining postsecondary opportunities (Belasco, 2013). School districts have specific parameters for high school counselors and each school has particular constraints. Knowing what those are informed my research questions and guided an understanding of the participants in the study.

An additional bias is that I believe that social capital can be a key driver in providing opportunity to low socioeconomic students. In the data collection and analysis, I mediated this bias by asking objectively phrased questions for the participants, and purposefully stating back to them my interpretation of their commentary. This allowed for a free-flowing conversation within the interviews, ensuring my reception of their commentary was accurate and not simply a reflection of my bias. Therefore, within my analysis, I hope I did not code information from my reflexive position, but rather the synthesis of the participants responses.

Limitations

Since this article focused explicitly on freshman career academy counselors and their influence on low socioeconomic students, not including race/ethnicity as a deeper part of that analysis was a limitation. Often, there are overlaps in educational outcomes between low socioeconomic students and students of Color, Black and Hispanic students in particular (Almeida, 2016; R. D. Cox, 2016; Murillo et al., 2017; Welton & Williams, 2015). However, including race/ethnicity could be an opportunity for future research on how freshman career academy counselors influence low socioeconomic students of Color.

Chapter Four: Findings

The findings provide an examination of the data collected through participant interviews, document analysis, and archival records review. The focus of the examination was based on the purpose of the study, which was to learn and understand how high school counselors, operating within a high school career academy model in an urban school district influence college and career opportunities for their low socioeconomic students. This study was also guided by the proposition that high school counselors act as a form of social capital for low socioeconomic students regarding postsecondary decision-making.

Three themes were established within the findings. They are: 1) the freshman academy counselor as a person, their school, and its resources, 2) the bias freshman academy counselors may have concerning student potential, and 3) the complementary nature of influence that freshman academy counselors possess. These themes provide a comprehensive, detailed understanding of how freshman academy counselors in an urban school district can influence low socioeconomic students on their postsecondary decisions.

Freshman Academy Counselor: The Person, Their School, and Its Resources

There were three categories that emerged regarding the freshman academy counselor as a person, their school, and its resources. The categories are: 1) the person behind the position, 2) the importance of context at specific schools, and 3) the access to resources at their school and how those resources meet student needs.

The category of the person behind the position focuses on the reasons why each participant became a freshman academy counselor, and how they perceive their own influence on student decisions. The category of the importance of context at specific schools provides an understanding of school specific challenges, and how support for freshman academy counselors

from school staff and other professionals differs from school to school. Finally, the category of universal access to resources acknowledges the district-wide resources that freshman academy counselors wish for greater access to and how those resources are different based on each school.

The person behind the position. The interviews conducted and documents analyzed showcased the reality that who each freshman academy counselor is as a person plays a role in how they act as a freshman academy counselor. This section explores, generally, each participant's reason for joining the counseling profession and how they view their own influence over students' decisions in relation to their fellow professionals.

Each participant decided to become a freshman academy counselor based on one of two definitive reasons. The first reason many participants decided to become a freshman academy counselor was professional; each participant had the belief that they had a natural ability to counsel, they wanted a change in career, or they saw counseling as an opportunity to have a greater impact on long-term student outcomes. For Counselor H, it was a skill she had always had. She explained, "I've always been a counselor, even as a high school student, I've always been the go-to person." For Counselors B, D, and F, it was the next opportunity in their professional careers. Counselor D came from outside of the education system from a career in business and sales because, "I like working with kids and I wanted to get back to the community. I am a very compassionate human and just care about kids and I wanted to see them be successful and I wanted to help." Counselor F came from a career in the classroom as a math teacher, but, "finally, after twenty-something years, decided to take the leap when an opening came available here to jump into a new role and out of the classroom." Counselor B also came from the classroom. He explained that he "wanted to have a bigger impact outside of the classroom and be able to work with more kids and be able to impact the school."

The second reason many participants chose to become a freshman academy counselor was due to distinct life experiences that occurred as they were growing up that compelled them to support students who came from similar situations. Counselors A and G each grew up in a challenging environment and their counselors had either a profoundly positive or profoundly negative impact on them. For Counselor G, the impact was positive:

> When I was growing up, home was not very good, and school was my place. I was raised in a single parent home. My mom was kind of disconnected and she had a very negative school experience. But school was where I thrived and where I did well. And my mom went through some really tough years, and when I was a teenager, my teachers and my counselor were the people that encouraged me and really helped me be successful. So, I knew that, that's what I wanted to do.

For Counselor A, the experience with a counselor was extremely negative:

> When I was in high school, I remember my counselor specifically telling me I was not going to go to college or not do well in college. I felt so defeated, because my parents didn't go to college. My parents knew they wanted me to go to college, but they didn't really know how to get me there. I always said when I went into education, I wanted to be a counselor so I could give someone the experience I didn't get.

Counselor C and Counselor E had similar stories to one another. They did not provide personal accounts of how a counselor impacted them, but rather how difficult their childhoods were and how it taught them the value of community support. Counselor C recounted her upbringing instructively:

> I always had a village to help me; I'm the only child and my mom didn't have the best opportunities as far as how to tell me where to go to college or how to get the money I

> needed but she gave me all types of resources, and that is the best thing that she could have ever done. So, I just, you know, continue on with that.

Counselor E remarked on how her adolescence taught her that she could connect with students who were also struggling:

> I felt like I didn't have a positive high school experience and I struggled a lot with all types of barriers. I've been homeless and I've been, you know, like, lost people to gun violence and had people incarcerated and drugs and, you know, the whole lifestyle a lot of these students' experience, I've kind of went through myself.

While each participant had their own reasons why they wanted to become a freshman academy counselor, each participant listed themselves as a major person of influence for their students' postsecondary decisions.

Each participant stated that the freshman academy counselor played a major role in students selecting their career pathways, which, in a career academy model, is how students determine what they want to do after high school. Participants also explicitly mentioned teachers, peers, and parents as influential people for students making this decision. Still, there seemed to be a clear agreement that the freshman academy counselor was the most influential role and not only because of the job duties assigned to the role.

Participants explained their influence in a manner that described their roles as something more akin to filling the gap of the assumed responsibilities of a parent or guardian rather than a school professional doing a job. Counselor D described how this phenomenon could occur:

> We love to partner with parents and get them into the school and help students with those decision-makers, but a lot of times students don't have those supports. So that now rests on the school to help students make those decisions.

Counselor F talked about freshman academy counselors building trust in order to achieve that guardian like influence. Counselor F stated, “I think it starts here to where the kids know that they can trust us. This school. I mean, I think it starts the foundation.” Counselor E provided detail on how that trust could be obtained:

> Whether it’s celebrating simple success or, you know, good, bad, or indifferent, I always tell students I’m here for you, so they know to come see me. If it’s something good, something bad, or they just want to come in and take a break, you know my door’s always open.

Every counselor also agreed that a teacher of some kind also had a major level of influence on postsecondary decisions. Some counselors were more specific, differentiating between a classroom teacher, freshman seminar teacher, and career and technical education (CTE) teacher with regard to influence on students’ postsecondary decisions. Many counselors referenced academy coaches as influential as well. Counselor C said, “The academy coach does a great job with just trying to introduce, not only for them to the pathways, but to bring companies in to help us with those pathways and connecting once they become seniors.”

A group that also played a role in student pathway selection were peers. Counselor E captured the sentiment when she said, “To be honest, their peers influence each other. If you have one, the leader of a friend group or the popular one, want to go to into engineering then all the other friends want to go.”

Counselor D highlighted the fact that many people help a student decide on a career pathway and that freshman academy counselors welcome their involvement in any possible way:

> Any stakeholders in that student’s life that can help them be successful and involve them–because there’s a lot of people that are part of students’ lives–if we can get

everyone on board and on the same path, same plan, ultimately that's going to help support the students.

Determining who in the school is able and available to help each student succeed depends heavily on where the students and the freshman academy counselor are placed. School context is important.

School context matters. This section explores school specific challenges and support from school staff and other professionals. This section highlights how specific context in a school can change how freshman academy counselors focus their efforts with regard to college and career opportunities for low socioeconomic students.

There were many challenges that freshman academy counselors mentioned that were specific to the school environment. One of those challenges was the total number of students in the freshman academy. Counselors A and G each mentioned this specific challenge. Counselor A said, "I cannot influence like I want to. There's no way that I can physically influence 450 freshmen." Counselor G, who had over 360 freshmen, mentioned how the nature of the job makes planning a daily schedule almost pointless, and explained, "Well I can have the best plan in my calendar of what I'm going to do and then sometimes it just goes crazy. My day is never the same."

Another challenge was the pipeline of students and schools where many freshman academy counselors recruit their future students. The participants explained they recruit from a certain area in the community. The area refers to a zone where their students may live. The high school is the area school, and many middle schools reside in that area. Counselor D explained that this is often where freshman academy counselors recruit and the pathway selection process begins:

> I'll get my gain list of kids that are getting projected to come to me based on the [area] or kids that have been accepted here in the spring. In the spring, I go back out to the middle schools and I do an enrollment session with them where they complete their schedule. They basically let me know, you know, what academic level, what pathway elective, based on the information.

As a result, many freshman academy counselors did not get to pick their population of students; rather, they recruited from the available student pool and tried to convince students that the pathways in their building were interesting. This created a challenge. Freshman academy counselors were sometimes faced with the difficult choice to recruit students who did not want any of their pathways or to help those students find a different high school that better matched the interests of each student. The participants had different approaches on how to handle this challenge. Counselor C shared that she was honest with students during recruitment. She explained the focus for her was to get students to do something they loved, not necessarily choose her school:

> I always tell them to focus on their goals and their dreams. One thing I did at [District One exposition] was say, look, yes, I see that you came to this table. Awesome, but you want to go into something we don't have. You need to go to every school that has that program, and you need to talk to them. It's just like looking for a job.

Counselor F explained that she took the skills building approach to attract them to her school and told students how any opportunity could benefit them if they learned how to expand their skill set:

> You've already got skills in something that the economy and the world is asking for. So if you want to be a math teacher and you want to do a side job, why not do something

> with graphic design, you could do that, you know, get you a website, you could do that on the side and make some extra cash.

Counselor A was similar to Counselor F, and provided an anecdote of a student who had an interest in a career as a physician and how choosing a different but similar pathway could still be useful to them:

> Maybe you want to be a doctor and we don't have a doctor pathway, but we only have pre-vet if you like animals. So that's the Science of another type of body, but it is a body. Or you could do our nursing pathway. We look for ways to connect them to a program here, because that's what they'll do for the next three years.

Another challenge highlighted was the difficulty in students getting to select their first choice for pathways. It mattered more to some counselors than others, but for some students, there were not enough options for each student to get their first pathway choice. Counselor E expressed this point:

> I wish all students could get their first choice, but we don't have enough. We needed a new culinary teacher, but the state didn't give us one. But I know we could fill up that pathway quick for culinary, but we didn't get another teacher this year so that limits our freshmen opportunities.

A final challenge was a result of the high level of autonomy in each school on how the freshman academy model is executed. Some counselors still focus on individualized learning plans (ILPs) while others teach a direct course to help students select their pathway. Even with the direct course given to students, there was no districtwide system for implementation, as Counselor D concluded, "From what I understand, every Freshman Academy has a freshman seminar course. Some schools' kind of embed that course." An additional way that school

context plays a role is through the additional school staff and available professionals who can help freshman academy counselors influence student postsecondary outcomes.

While the freshman academy counselor is the designated coordinator of the freshman academy program, each participant was quick to acknowledge they did not reach the outcomes on student pathway selection by themselves. Counselor C suggested that a recent change in district collaboration was a key aspect of connectivity between freshman academy counselors:

> We have counselor meetings every month and this year we've started comprehensive counseling plans. The district leads them; they've begun doing comprehensive counseling plans and actually doing, like, mission statements and asking what SMART goals you have for this year.

While the district can play a role, Counselors D and F described that the relationship with the assistant principal and other professionals in the building was also important, especially in dealing with the challenges and trauma that many students have. Counselor D stated, "We have an amazing [family resources coordinator] here that provides those supports for students; makes sure that they have what they need to live. You know, those basic needs are covered." Counselor F mentioned the academy coach, the position responsible in many schools for delivering career content to students, when she said, "Our academy coach here does a great job of feeding them the information; using the statistical Bureau of Labor Statistics, all that economic data, you know, for the next 10 years and stuff."

Counselor B wanted to make it clear there were many additional staff and professionals at his school who were key supporters:

> I think we got some other support. We got an academy coach here that also works with kids and anybody within our freshman academy including a homeschool coordinator. You know it can be behavior coaches; it can be anybody that's working with these kids.

Counselor E took a similar approach, welcoming any professional who wanted to help. She mentioned that school resources were tight, and she utilized mentors to help reach students for some of the socio-behavioral needs:

> The students are very traumatized and so teachers kind of feel that. We all just work together just trying to give the students a positive high school experience the best we can with what we have. But again, you know, and if anyone ever wants to come in and help, we always enjoy extra help.

For Counselor A, classroom teachers were major professional supporters. Counselor A utilized classroom teachers at the school to reach freshmen. Counselor A said, "I've taken the time to train my teachers. Every year we go through the curriculum and say, this was a good unit, or, nope this wasn't a good lesson take this one out."

Counselor D said his school provides professional support through an attendance committee. He said the committee meets "every two weeks, where we focus on students who are coming to school and then make home visits; they bring families in and we talk to kids." Many of our freshman academy counselors, though, acknowledged that beyond professional and staff support, greater access to resources could aid their efforts to influence their students' postsecondary success.

Universal access to resources. This section analyzes the access to resources that could enhance the influence of freshman academy counselors on low socioeconomic students and their career decisions. This section reviews the equitable distribution of personnel, and the importance

of the resource of time. It also reviews district-wide systems technology, postsecondary definitions, and professional development, as well as variations on the freshman academy seminar, and wraparound services for students.

The resources for personnel seemed to be uneven. Counselor H noted, "Currently we're down a school counselor, so I'm assuming more roles." However, at Counselor D's school, they had many staff members to meet student needs:

> Each academy has their own principal, each Academy has their own counselor, teacher, lead, and core teachers in those academies. So, we're really able to name and claim students and provide that strong sense of belonging so students feel connected.

Counselor G also talked about how the other professionals in the building helped when she said, "We have resource teachers and we have an academy coach that helps us do some academy stuff." For Counselor C, the personnel issue manifested itself in the number of students per teacher and counselor. Lowering that ratio by increasing professionals could help build relationships with students:

> If it is my wish, I think we would have a lot more teachers because I don't like large classroom sizes. As far as low-income, that connection is real. And I don't think you can have it with 30 plus kids in your room. As far as the counselors are concerned, I wouldn't mind having a counselor for every grade.

While personnel issues seemed to stem around equity at each school, a resource that each participant mentioned they needed more access to was time.

The concern regarding access to the resource of time should not be confused with the management of existing time. Counselor G made clear that it was not a struggle of managing

what to do in a day, but rather the issue of having too many items that students need to know but freshman academy counselors did not have the permitted time to present:

> There's just not enough hours in the day, to be honest. I wish I had more time sometimes in the classroom, but the classroom teachers have got to cover their content, too. So sometimes I wish I had more time to be in front of the students but talking to other counselors I'm getting in the class as much, if not more, than most of the others.

Counselor A was concerned about this as well. Counselor A mentioned the importance of providing one-on-one support for each student. Counselor A concluded, though, that there was not enough time, and stated, "I think the thing that's disheartening to me is that, the type of effort I put into that kid, I wish I could do that more often. And that's where those resources come into play." Counselor A relied on outside organizations, especially fraternities and community groups, to support the efforts to reach the boys in the freshman academy in particular.

Counselor C found that the issue of time is most constricting when dealing with scheduling a student's semester of courses. The process took more time than a traditional school day:

> I may do some scheduling but, because I don't like to do scheduling during the day because it takes up a whole lot of time, I usually stay late. School's out at about 2:20pm, I probably stay around 4, and I'll do scheduling then, because it's quiet and I can concentrate versus me doing scheduling during the day because it doesn't work. I have 180 students.

Counselor B explained how adequate access to time goes in waves when he expressed that, "Sometimes I feel like, hey I'm doing a great job; kind of really rocking it out. Other days I get stretched so thin in what I'm asked to do." Due to time constraints, often based on how each

school day at each school is designed, each freshman academy counselor was asked to engage their time as necessary to fit the needs of their school. Still, each participant mentioned that another resource that they all would benefit from would be a recognition of district-wide technology, shared definitions of postsecondary opportunities, and professional development.

The participants expressed an interest in working through a shared system or interface, where freshman academy counselors could have a better idea of outcomes. Counselor H discussed wanting a better system to track what her students ended up doing after high school:

> Our students may go to a trade school. So how is that being tracked and how's that being monitored? I think a lot of our students want to go directly into the workforce. So, we need to provide more apprenticeship opportunities and just exposure to that arena which, as a Freshman Academy counselor, I've not done enough.

Counselor F explained her school has tried to be more technologically focused, especially for master scheduling students class schedules, using Google for their data collection rather than paper. She said the switch from paper to digital was beneficial due to freshman population growth. She explained, "I'm not doing that with 500 kids because last year I had 380. This year I've got 500. So, I'm like, we're doing Google." Counselor G also commented on how time-consuming scheduling can be when she said, "This is a huge part of our job. I spend hours and hours; I mean up until two three in the morning sometimes at home trying to get all their schedules done."

Counselor H expressed a desire for clarity on what postsecondary means, and how it can address all of her students. She argued that the ambiguity adds a layer of complication to her job and said, "We're pushing college so much at an accelerated rate and we never address certain

students. When we say postsecondary, are we talking about additional job training? Are we talking about a four-year college degree? What specifically does that mean?"

Another area where district level resources could be useful was around freshman academy counselor training. Counselor D mentioned that, even if other resources were abundant, the freshman counselor role required a bit of professional development:

> You know, we have a ton of resources; I don't know if you can ever have too much. I think when you come in, you have to learn how to be a school counselor because college and career is only such a small component of what you do every single day.

Counselor A agreed and mentioned an opportunity to develop a freshman seminar after a professional development trip:

> I went to a conference in Boston and in the school district up there they have a class similar to this; and we brought it back and we started it and we've improved it every year. I see it as my counselor role as that piece being brought out through this class.

Another area where access to resources was not universal was with regard to the freshman academy seminars at each school.

There was a wide range with how each freshman academy seminar was delivered to students. Some freshman academy counselors built the entire curriculum and taught the course; others presented at a course only a few times a semester. This created a wide range of utilization for the course, as well as a wide range in the resources that each school put into developing the course over time. For example, Counselor D implemented a freshmen course and was able to expand its utility in the career pathway selection process:

> They do a college tour as a freshman as well. So, we take them on a college campus based on their career interest. Through that course we bring in different career people,

> you know, to come talk to them about different careers that are out there. We partner with Limestone bank, they come and talk to the kids about different financial literacy components, that type of thing; how to get a checking account, how to get a credit card, talk about loans, all that stuff. We take them on a job shadow as well. We partner with different career companies throughout the city.

Sometimes, the freshman academy seminar focused on items outside of direct content on postsecondary opportunities, such as identity development and interest generation. This seemed to be able to help students first identify who they are and the work they enjoy in order to pick a career that meets those needs. At Counselor A's school, the seminar took on this broader purpose:

> We have a class and one of the main roles of that is career exploration. So, like, for instance, right now they just finished the Who Am I unit. So, it's a lot about who they are, what types of things do they like, what types of things make them who they are.

The fidelity of these freshman academy seminars was important, as this could be a place to explicitly provide additional support for low socioeconomic students. Counselor C explained how she focused more on a standalone freshman academy seminar or workshop that could help low socioeconomic students and families specifically:

> We realize that we don't do as much parent stuff, as we should. So, we're trying to focus and reach out to parents more as well. We're trying to reach out to kids as far as developing workshops on things that they need to focus on, or they want to focus on, and they need.

As previously mentioned, each participant was a freshman academy counselor at a school that had majority low socioeconomic students. This was a core aspect of this study. This suggests

that, as low socioeconomic students have different needs, those needs must be met. Wraparound services, services of social need that work alongside the academic and career functions of some public school systems, were additional resources that participants mentioned as important.

While each participant expressed the desire to have more resources, wraparound services seemed to be delivered inequitably. But, based on their interests and access, students may need different resources. Counselor A mentioned how this makes it difficult to have everything a freshman academy counselor may need for low socioeconomic students:

> I think I have some of the resources; I don't know that I can probably ever really have all the resources that I need because there's just so much they're not exposed to. Yeah, there's so much knowledge that they need.

Counselor D concurred. He explained, "Our students at risk, they come with a lot of needs. There are more at risk now. And we have a lot of support. We have a full-time mental health practitioner here." Counselor C was also explicit on how wraparound services were an important resource that helped her provide comprehensive resources to students in order for them to reach their postsecondary goals:

> We have wraparound services in the building; we have something called ETS, Education Talent Search. We have committees, too. We have an attendance committee. We connect so we have all the counselors there, mental health counselors, [family resources coordinators], the resource coordinators, ETS, Upward Bound. We have all those services together, so we can talk about what's going on with the school, and how we can make it better.

Counselor F discussed how the wraparound services were important because they provided a foundation of support and consistency for students who may not otherwise have it:

> We provide all kinds of wraparound services to give them the most stability, as much as possible in their lives. We have foster situations; we have homeless situations; we have every drug, prison, and everything going on. I mean, there's ways to be successful. It takes hard work, commitment, and a good support system.

In order for wraparound services to be properly utilized by freshman academy counselors to best support students, freshman academy counselors must have an understanding of those students' needs, both in the present as freshman and for their future after high school. For low socioeconomic students, the bias concerning student potential that freshman academy counselors may have regarding their postsecondary opportunities, was paramount.

Bias Concerning Student Potential

There were two categories in the theme of bias concerning student potential: 1) freshman academy counselor perceptions of low socioeconomic students, and 2) the direct influence of race and class on a freshman academy counselor influencing their students' postsecondary opportunities. An analysis of the perceptions that freshman academy counselors had of low socioeconomic students concluded that the freshman academy counselor's belief that the school environment was the source of the achievement gap between low socioeconomic students and their peers, that low socioeconomic students and families themselves caused the gap, and that the freshman academy counselor was a gatekeeper of postsecondary opportunity. The category discussing direct influence of race and class focuses on how the race or class of a student could affect how a freshman academy counselor approaches those students' possibilities of success.

Perceptions of low socioeconomic students. Every participant professed that they believed low socioeconomic students are capable of achieving their postsecondary goals. Where the divergence occurred among participants was with the reasons why low socioeconomic

students may not currently be achieving those goals. This section focuses on those perceptual divergences, which include the perceptions that the school environment is the source of the achievement gap between low socioeconomic students and their peers; that low socioeconomic students and families themselves caused the gap; and, that the freshman academy counselor was an opportunity gatekeeper.

Counselor H believed that low socioeconomic students can succeed, but seemed to conflate low socioeconomic students with students who had gaps in core academic development throughout their earlier educational experience:

> I think there are a number of opportunities. My concern is, I don't know if they've received the foundational skills from elementary, middle and high school. I often wonder how effective we can be getting them so late, some of them academically are just so far behind. So, we're playing a lot of catch up. We're remediating them, as well as trying to prepare them for the future in such a short amount of time.

When discussing the low socioeconomic students in the building, Counselor F stated she believed every student in the school had opportunity, despite their background, and the school would make sure those students succeed. She said, "We know that every child here has every opportunity they want. There's a way to make it happen. We bend over backwards for every one of our kids to get them any resource that they need." Counselor B agreed regarding his school context, but said that low socioeconomic students also needed encouragement about what they could do, as well as exposure to what is available:

> I think it's trying to convince the kids that they're good enough to do it, because the tools are all there. Most of the kids here can minimally go to community college for free. It's

> kind of really working with them; motivating them; encouraging them; giving them praise. There’s more on the table than ever before.

Some participants did not see the school as the source of the problem at all; some participants had biases against the profile of the students themselves.

Counselor E mentioned that some students may not have taken advantage of the opportunities, or may have wasted the opportunities that were available:

> I feel the disconnect, though, actually is some students get the student loans or the FAFSA money, and then they don’t go to college. I think that is the biggest concern I have as just an educational counselor. That’s the breakdown. My own friends have done that. Most of our students were like 91% free and reduced lunch or free lunch and so obviously that’s pretty much the entire school, but we offer postsecondary with the careers like an apprenticeship program. I mean there's tons of opportunities for students. Some students don't take advantage of it.

Counselor A mentioned something similar through the context of concern and said:

> I think for kids in poverty, you have to open their eyes to everything, because they haven’t had much, you know, real exposure. They’ve not seen anything except for what they know. Most of my kids here, they don’t have two parents in the household. And the one parent is working. I talked to a mom; maybe a couple weeks ago. She’s three jobs; four kids and three jobs. So, what do you think those kids are seeing as an adult role model at home?

As some freshman academy counselors experienced difficulty in getting parents and students actively engaged in the pathway selection process, some freshman academy counselors took it upon themselves to select pathways for students as a way to help them succeed.

Some counselors also chose pathways for students, creating the perception that, while low socioeconomic students were capable, freshman academy counselors were better suited to make career decisions for them. Specifically, regarding the documents shared, Counselor E's documents seemed to allow the student to be more unrestricted in their selection of the pathway, only to have Counselor E choose for them based on availability followed by preference. For Counselor F, based on the documents provided, it seemed as though the pathway selection focus was more on getting students into a pathway in general as opposed to getting them into a pathway that specifically fit them.

An aspect of how freshman academy counselors discussed how they prepare low socioeconomic students for postsecondary opportunities revolved around how much knowledge freshman academy counselors had regarding resources for low socioeconomic students in the career and college application process. While each participant provided documents related to postsecondary opportunities, counselors A, C, D, F, and G produced thorough, coherent documents that showed a connectedness and a process to pathway selection. Counselors C and G provided a graduation plan document which outlined classes students needed to take in order to graduate with a specific pathway. For Counselor G, this matched her explanation about the course she taught. The first lesson was on tolerance, followed by a lesson on school transcripts, scholarships, and why an academic GPA is important. Another lesson was about stress and the socio-emotional aspect of high school. She explained in great detail how she rolled all of this knowledge into one presentation for students:

> I tell them about my experience and how I'm the first kid in my family go to college. My mother was a school bus driver for [District One] with three kids. There was no way she could put me through school. So, I talk to them about scholarships. Yes, I got some

> scholarships, they were just for the first year, though, so there's year two, three, and four that have to get paid for. So, I tell them about grant money. And if you're in a certain income bracket, you might qualify for grant money and that's a gift that you, as long as you use it and you pass your classes and do what you're supposed to, you get that as a gift. And then I talk about student loans and the pros and cons of student loans. Like, yes, they're not ideal, but it's an investment in yourself. I don't care how poor you are or where you come from; your counselor's here will help you find that route for you to get to go to school. And then, many of our career technical ed pathways have business partners that want them to come work for them and then they will pay for them to go to school.

How freshman academy counselors perceived their low socioeconomic students played a role in how they provided information on opportunities for them to succeed. While providing financial resources for low socioeconomic students was viewed as important by all participants, providing non-financial support explicitly for low socioeconomic students was resisted by some participants. When race was considered as a factor, counselors reacted differently.

Direct affects of race and class. This section focuses on the approach that freshman academy counselors took regarding explicit resources for low socioeconomic students, and Students of Color, regarding their postsecondary opportunities.

An interesting dichotomy emerged with regard to low socioeconomic students. While each participant acknowledged the importance of providing financial resources for students to be successful, there was conflicting perspective towards treating low socioeconomic students any differently with regard to non-financial resources, expectations, and outcomes.

With regard to finances, attending to the financial needs of low socioeconomic students was a front-and-center focus of the participants. Several counselors, including G, H, and F, discussed a specific state-sponsored merit-based scholarship that could be used for postsecondary expenses. Counselor F said the scholarship could be available for "journey men's classes, trade schools, licensing tests, books, tools; anything that has to do with education." She also used a metaphor referencing employment when she said, "Whatever you're getting, basically, this is your job. This is your job right now. And you're getting paid for that GPA, it's going into an account." Counselor E had similar knowledge on financial resources for low socioeconomic students. She stated, "I do think there's opportunities for low income students to partake in college or postsecondary programs and it's a lot of times mostly free."

The interest in improving financial prospects extended beyond paying for postsecondary opportunities. Counselor A, who utilized a District One approved Google Doc, mentioned how there was a unit in the freshman academy class that focused on how money and salary related to career choice. Counselor A taught this unit so students could walk through the process of actually applying to college and have a specific major that would aid them in their life goals once they graduated. Counselor D's documents were similar. They outlined, in detail, the certifications, occupations, and starting and average salaries connected to the career pathways for his school.

Counselor B, who did not provide any documents, also demonstrated clear knowledge in opportunities for low socioeconomic students. He reiterated the perspective that low socioeconomic students could receive significant financial aid if they chose to attend a postsecondary institution. Regularly mentioning community college as a starting point until students can discover the full scope of opportunities, he said, "It's our responsibility as

counselors to make sure that they have the tools that they need to discover these different opportunities: schools, colleges, programs that are out there for them."

Aside from finances, the indifference to supporting low socioeconomics with non-financial resources was either because it was a non-factor in the mind of the freshman academy counselor, or it was so all consuming it did not change how they performed in providing postsecondary resources for students. Counselor F, who saw it as a non-factor, seemed to resent the idea that focusing on low socioeconomic students in a special way, with regard to academic support, could even be effective:

> I think it makes them uncomfortable. I think that they're smarter than what you think they are. And they know when they're being pulled for certain reasons and special populations. And our kids just pretty much go with the flow. And I mean, they rise to our expectations, regardless of where they come from. Now, we may have to pull somebody aside and say, "hey, get your act together." But it doesn't matter; that doesn't have anything to do with where you came from. We teach everybody the same.

Many counselors echoed this indifference to low socioeconomic students as a group of students who needed significantly more non-financial postsecondary support than other students. These statements were also supported by the documentation as none of the documentation included anything specific to low-income students. Counselor D also mentioned that some of his "low socioeconomic students are very resilient, and they may not need all those, you know, intense supports." He went on further to state that, "Some do; and then some of my high socioeconomic students may need intense supports, too." These sentiments did not seem antagonistic towards low socioeconomic students, but rather resigned to the fact that the non-

academic challenges were normal. Counselor D delivered an almost clinical analysis on the issue:

> You know, I don't look at that as—it is a barrier, yeah—but I think you make sure that you're doing everything as an educator to support that kid so that they do have those opportunities after high school. You always believe and you always support that student. And again, you're working to kind of figure out what their interests are. And then you're just putting a plan in place.

Counselor H had the all-encompassing perspective. She stated it plainly and explained, "Most of our students are low-income, so I don't think income plays a significant role." While many counselors looked at low socioeconomics with indifference regarding non-financial resources for postsecondary opportunities, nearly every participant took the opposite approach when discussing Students of Color.

Many participants expressed a desire for belonging and inclusion for their Students of Color. Many participants went so far as to increase their numbers in different pathways for the purposes of racial diversity. Many participants echoed Counselor B, whose school was not a majority of Students of Color, who said, "I'm always advocating for different pathways for school. And, you know, I say it openly. I want more opportunities, more pathways, and more choices than what we have [for my Students of Color]." Counselor G had a more personal assessment, she explained, "I mean I was a [District One] kid myself. I grew up in here. I'm used to diversity. I love working with different students." Counselor D approached it from an administrative perspective:

> We do have a [racial equity plan] in place and we also look at our equity monitoring progress tool to making sure that we're looking at our gaps, and making sure we have

> those supports in place to support that student, we want every student to have a strong sense of belonging.

Participants also voiced the importance of a deliberate effort to support Students of Color within the career pathways selection process through increased visible representation of adults who look like the student population. Counselor C articulated a belief that having more Teachers of Color or Administrators of Color would be beneficial to Students of Color, particularly the young men:

> I think it's one of those things where I feel like we need more representation in the building. I just feel like with males, we need to cater and support them more. And I think they're trying to do that.

Counselor A agreed with this perspective and said that, for Students of Color, visible representation was vital:

> People say, you know, that's why Barack Obama is so important. He absolutely was as a president, but how many Black teachers have they had? They haven't had very many for a lot of my kids, I would venture to say. I'm probably their first Black counselor.

For many freshman academy counselors, support for Students of Color went beyond pathways and seemed to manifest itself in the advocacy messages mentioned above. This seemed to suggest that there was a complementary nature of influence within the freshman academy counselor role; freshman academy counselors could influence students through the functions of the job itself, highlighting opportunity, and acting as social capital.

The Complementary Nature of Influence

There were three categories in the theme focused on the complementary nature of influence of a freshman academy counselor. Those categories are: 1) influence through function, 2) influence of opportunity, 3) and influence as social capital.

The category of influence through function discusses how freshman academy counselors focus on their students passing ninth grade, counselor accountability and evaluations regarding the career readiness portion of the role, and reactions to student survey data. The category of influence of opportunity explains the career academy recruitment process and the pathway selection methods within the freshman academy model. Finally, the category of influence as social capital gives an analysis of how counselors encourage skill development, promote economic potential, provide socio-emotional support, and inspire hope in the future.

Influence through function. Freshman academy counselors had a specific function. That function included helping freshmen pass ninth grade, being held accountable on the career readiness portion of their role, and reviewing student surveys. This section explores these elements in detail.

For freshman academy counselors, getting their students to successfully finish ninth grade was the basic minimum of their responsibilities but one that registered as a premium for each of them. Counselor C said, "I'm just trying to get them to transition, because the eighth and ninth grade is hard." Counselor H provided a thorough analysis on why freshman year was so foundational:

> There are so many indicators during the freshman year to determine how things are going to look. For example, Algebra I is a strong indicator, which is normally taken in the freshman year of high school completion. So, if I'm going to help students reach their

> goals postsecondary after they graduate from high school, I need to first make sure they can pass Algebra I because it's just such a strong indicator. Freshman year just really lays the foundation to the entire high school experience.

On the importance of passing ninth grade, Counselor E agreed and stated that with regard to students, "The purpose of a freshman counselor is to get them to think of the importance – I think with urban students–at passing their freshman year and why is that relevant." Counselor G concurred and proclaimed, "Our job is to transition them into a career pathway and an academy," which, in a career academy model, could only happen if students were able to get through their freshman year of high school.

With the ultimate goal of high school being graduation, Counselors E, D, and A talked about how a student's chances of graduating high school went down dramatically if they did not pass ninth grade. Counselor A explained how important it was to get it right the first time:

> I work really hard to, to try to get them to pass freshman year, because I know how important that is. And I know the ramifications if they fail their freshman year that they are almost 80% more likely to not ever graduate from high school. If they don't have that nurturing environment that pulls them in to high school and gets them off on the right path–it doesn't matter what they do in three more years if I can't get them together now.

Counselor B expressed the same concern in near absolute terms:

> I know that if I can get them interested, get them engaged, they have a better chance of graduating on time with their cohort. I know that if I can't do that, and they start missing school and failing classes in freshman year, the less likely that they're going to have a chance to get out of here and be able to do something, you know, more postsecondary.

Counselor D announced his belief that his "role here is making sure students successfully transition from middle school to high school and they understand everything they need to be successful in high school."

Each freshman academy counselor believed it was important to pass freshman year, and some participants went into detail explaining how they helped students reach that goal. Counselor G talked about how she focused on a lot of the formal aspect of freshman year and told students that, "It's important for them to understand every class is important and every class is a credit that's required by the state; that we can't give you a diploma if you don't meet these criteria." Counselor D said he tried to get the same message across through his freshman seminar course. He told students about "what it takes to be promoted, what credit you got, how many credits you're going to have to be promoted; how many credits you need to graduate, you know, what classes you need to graduate as well." Counselor F utilized her freshman seminar course as well:

> In the freshman academy, we have our freshman seminar class, and they focus on helping our freshmen get acclimated to high school, which can be organizational skills, study skills, just learning tradition at our high school, how we act in high school, you know, just going from your class to the cafeteria on your own.

Getting students to complete ninth grade is one of the functional aspects of a freshman academy counselor's job. Another functional responsibility discussed was each counselor being held accountable through evaluations.

The participants focused a great deal on the requirements of ninth grade, as well as the compliance function of their role. Counselor H said, "The accountability model for the [state department of education] is college and career readiness so I do have a stake in helping students

make the best decision for postsecondary goals." This also rang true for non-academic issues, as Counselor F stated the difference, in her opinion, between a freshman academy counselor and a teacher. She said, "As a teacher, you got everything done that day to be prepared for the next day. Counseling, you have to take it as it comes because you never know what's gonna hit your door every five minutes." This perspective could be responsible for what felt like a culture of compliance during the interviews; some freshman academy counselors felt compelled to provide explicitly what was asked of them by some authority. This became clear when discussing evaluations for the career readiness portion of the counselor role.

The evaluation process regarding the career readiness portion of the role for freshman academy counselors seemed to be school-driven or individually designed by each freshman academy counselor. There did not appear to be a systemic process or standard to which freshman academy counselors were held with regard to their work as leaders in career pathway selection for freshmen. There also seemed to be confusion to whom freshman academy counselors should be held accountable. Counselor D said, "My principal at the end of the year evaluates me," but Counselor E said, "To be honest, the state looks at that," and that the evaluation process "should have an input from the families and students through that survey that we reviewed. I think that's important feedback as well as how we're supporting students." There were freshman academy counselors who set goals for themselves, namely around student success or student interaction. Counselor B had several goals, including one-on-one interaction with each of his students, as well as a "90% course pass rate and 90% attendance." Counselor B said, "My biggest evaluations probably come from myself and self-reflections, to be quite honest." Counselor A, another freshman academy counselor who set their own goals, did not believe the existing evaluation system was a strong one:

> We are evaluated every year by developing our own goal. A lot of times my goal is connected to retention. You could argue while 94% of your freshman are moving on to be sophomores successfully, you've done something right in the freshman year. The career pathway class was part of that. But do we have someone come in and evaluate the program? The class? No.

Still, some counselors were fine with the current system. Counselors G and H each said they liked the nimbleness of their current evaluations, due to the complex nature of their role. Counselor G said, "We do counsel students, but we don't do like ongoing therapy, so our biggest job is to help our kids be academically successful and help them transition to life outside of school." Counselor H mentioned collaborating with teachers on evaluations as well. She said, "You are definitely evaluated. I'm a data person myself so I track everything. I mean, my principal knows they can come to me for data and I also provide that information to teachers."

One freshman academy counselor, Counselor F, had been evaluated only once in two years:

> I've only been evaluated once, and I don't remember what it was. Not exactly. I mean, not in so many words. But I mean, we're evaluated on planning and preparation. Develop a plan to evaluate the counseling program. That's pretty broad. So, if you want to include career readiness in your counseling program, which we do, then that's part of it.

One universal form of evaluation for the participants was the end of the year District One survey that students took.

The participants were asked about an annual District One survey that went out to every freshman student in a freshman career academy. There were two District One survey questions that the freshman academy counselors were asked about. One question focused on whether or not

students believed adults at their school helped them with the steps needed to go to college. The other question participants were asked about focused on whether or not students believed their education prepared them to make a successful transition after graduation. The freshman academy counselors had varying opinions on whether or not they could, in their role, really influence the survey results. Counselor A believed that freshman academy counselors could influence the results. Counselor A said, "Your main job is that focus because it's an academy school. So, absolutely." Counselors F and G agreed and suggested that freshman academy counselors influenced the results because of how much they talked about postsecondary success. Counselor F expounded on the matter:

> We're kind of like in their face about it to be blunt. I mean, and that's what we talk about all the time. I mean, the reason why you go to high school and get that diploma is so that you have a future.

Counselor B also believed that freshman academy counselors played a role in the District One survey results. He also believed that the student experience in the process of pathway selection played a role in the survey results. Counselor C took a more nuanced approach, questioning how useful the survey data could be, based on when the survey was administered:

> I guess it depends, especially when the survey was out. Our freshmen now haven't picked a pathway, and they won't pick them until probably -- they have an opportunity to pick them in December. Last year, they didn't pick them until May. So, I guess it depends on when the survey actually comes out. I think it'd be a lot different once the survey, if the survey was created an implemented and actually given and distributed once the kids actually made their minds on their pathway.

Counselor H had a similar opinion. She stated that she believed that freshman academy counselors influenced the decisions, but also said she believed that school specific issues, such as attendance and student-teacher/counselor relationships, matter a great deal. She mentioned she had a personal relationship with 90% of the freshmen. Counselors D and E took both positions, belief that freshman academy counselors influenced the survey results and skepticism that freshman academy counselors influenced the results, but each provided additional context as to why they believed what they believed. Counselor D explained:

> We meet as a counseling advisory team with our counselors and we have other stakeholders, students, and parents, as well teachers, and we have a comprehensive school counseling program here. We look at these results. And so that definitely, you know, does play a factor in our programming here. I do wonder how much it's being done with fidelity when kids answer these questions. It's a long survey, and to give a kid a survey when it doesn't really play a factor, it's not a grade or anything, you know, how much are kids actually going in and answering those questions?

Counselor E echoed that sentiment and said, "I do think we do influence these results. But sometimes, I mean, just because I've been here for so long and I know the kids, sometimes I don't think they read all the questions and just fill them in." Counselor E was also concerned that students could not read the question because they did not speak English and had no one to read the question or interpret it for them.

Freshman academy counselors could influence student postsecondary outcomes through the function of their job, but they could also influence student postsecondary outcomes through the opportunities they create.

Influence of opportunity. This section explains how freshman academy counselors create opportunity through the career academy recruitment process and the pathway selection model. Understanding how freshman academy counselors manage the pathway selection system can provide insight into how they influence postsecondary opportunities for low socioeconomic students.

Pathway selection for career academy freshmen went through three phases of recruitment: middle school recruitment, freshman year recruitment, and freshman academy seminar. The process culminated with student selection.

The middle school recruitment process was a significant one for most freshman academy counselors. Counselor A said that a large part of the role is recruitment, Counselor A explained, "The recruitment piece as a freshman counselor to recruit eighth graders to come here, that's where the bulk of my time is." Counselor B agreed and said, "I do a lot of recruitment with eighth graders. I'm constantly just talking to families; talking to kids about those pathways." Counselor D explained how the process starts for him:

> I go out to all the middle schools and I talk with eighth graders. This is where I go out to about nine different middle schools and I talk to them about our upperclassmen academies and pathways and I explain to them what we offer. I talk about freshman academy and our support system structures; all that stuff. I really highlight everything we have to offer here. We also have an open house where they come and learn all about our different academies and pathways and our programming here.

Several of the freshman academy counselors had brochures for their schools that they would give to middle school students and parents to provide details on the pathway offerings and what they could expect. The brochures were formatted the same, which made it appear that

District One would provide the resources to develop a customized brochure for each school. Not every freshman academy counselor had a brochure, though. Counselor C mentioned how, where, and when those brochures might be used:

> We have something called feeder schools. So, usually, the middle school counselors invite me to a showcase or open house. When I go to those showcases or open houses, I’ve talked about our career pathways and what we have to offer. The [District One exposition] is also another event where I am talking about our career pathways and what we have to offer.

For Counselor E, visiting middle school students included an early enrollment program for potential career pathways:

> I go to the middle schools and I meet with the students as a whole group. I’ll meet with like 100 kids from a school and review this schedule card and review the pathways with them and then let them pick their first, second and third choice and this is when they enroll.

Counselor H described a recruitment process that, similarly to Counselor E, blended right into freshman year:

> We do different activities throughout the year so they can get exposure. For example, we do an academy fair, where they go – it’s like a career fair and they go and they learn about different academies. Then we have an academy field trip that’s in school, where we take them for a day, and then they go to different classrooms and participate and engage in activities to see if it sparks an interest.

Once students got into a freshman academy, freshman year recruitment began and each school continued with its own process of pathway selection. Each process took time, especially

at the beginning of the year. Counselor E said, “At the beginning of the year it’s a lot of strong academic and career guidance.” Counselor C explained how she got upperclassmen involved in the recruitment process:

> We do something called the promise to graduate. They usually come in as a group; we do a mock graduation so they can see how it feels to actually graduate from high school. We talk about the career pathways that we have, we bring people in, and then we have something called student ambassadors, and they come in and talk about the pathways that they are in so it's just not me talking about a pathway. It’s the students that are actually in the pathways coming in and talking about those different pathways and why they chose those.

At Counselor B’s school, each student met with an advisor weekly, where they would go over an ILP and focus on skills for a potential career, or soft skills that they could use in any field. Counselor B had nearly total control of the pathway selection process. Counselor F, who worked with three freshman academy coaches on the pathway selection process, explained how it worked for her:

> They basically do these mini field trips during the day and tours. They talk with all the students, they talk with the teachers, and they get the feel for what they would be doing in this pathway for the next three years if they choose to do that. They work on that for the first semester. And then when they come back in January, I asked them to give me their top three choices.

Counselor G did a career fair and they spent “several weeks working on making sure that [students] understand what each of these fields are, so that they can make a good choice for them.”

The final phase of recruitment was the freshman academy seminar. For each freshman academy counselor, the freshman academy seminar looked differently. In Counselor F's school, the freshman seminar was taught by the freshman academy coaches, who each have 165 students. Counselor F believed the freshman academy coaches were able to help the students who were already college ready students in a different way:

> Out of the 165, 40 to 50 of them are what we consider advanced program, who are most likely on the college track. Okay, so are they going to – even if they choose welding, or CAD, architecture, or graphic design – are they really going to do that for the rest of their life? Maybe, maybe not. But at least they can get a better job while they're in college to help pay for that college. That's the way we promote it.

Counselor B was able to take a different approach and focused on providing as much information as possible to students during their freshman academy seminar so they could make an informed decision:

> We also have a career exploration class within our academy. The kids here will spend a semester trying to discover different careers. The goal by the end of this class is for them to be able to have enough information to choose one of these upper academy pathways.

For Counselor D, the freshman seminar was "a full-blown, year-long credit bearing course that kids take." Counselor D expounded upon the course curriculum:

> Another component is college and career exploration. They take a career aptitude test in that course. From there, it kind of matches them with different careers out there based on their interest. Then, they kind of figure out what colleges – what education or what prerequisites they need in order to attain that career – that offer those majors. And so, they really research those, how much that costs, and everything like that.

Most counselors mentioned that students would make their pathway selection in the spring semester. Typically, decisions were made February and beyond. Counselor G said students at her school made their pathway selection in January because February was when one-on-one meetings were. During the fall semester, their freshman academy seminar was where students were given the information to make those decisions. Counselor G explained:

> We talk about each academy and each pathway that's in those academies. Then one day they will all each rotate through an academy and they'll sit, and they'll get to see students working and the students will talk about what they learned. The instructors will talk, and we also have business partners that will say, when you get these certifications, we will have you come and co-op with us or work for us.

Once the recruitment process was completed, freshman academy counselors had varying degrees of ability and interest with regard to influencing students' pathway selections beyond the student actually making a pathway choice within the pathway selection model.

The pathway selection model at each school, and the freshman academy counselor's ability to influence a students' pathway, was largely dependent on the individual authority of the freshman academy counselor to manage selection of pathways for students. Counselor B was prideful about the system his school has regarding pathway selection. He declared, "Our system is a little bit different. I'll let every kid here choose which pathway, and which academy they want to be in. I make sure that you get your first choice." Counselor B said it was done this way because he wanted students "to be engaged in what they're doing." Counselor C, who also seemed to have significant authority over the process, expressed that she would be fine to move a student out of a pathway if they did not get along with a certain teacher. She said, "And I'll maybe move faster, you know what, I don't think Johnny's doing well with this teacher, I'm a

move Johnny. Johnny's about to move. That's what the counselors really do." Counselor E seemed to exhibit the ability to take a variation of both approaches:

> We try to do the first request. If you have 20 kids that want engineering then as their first pick, then those 20 will go in there, depending on how the numbers fall. But we try to be equitable, making sure that there are students represented in all pathways. So, like engineering, we want obviously minority and female because they're both underrepresented in the engineering world or the STEM. And so, we always make sure we are equitable with placement of students, if possible.

Counselor F called herself the gatekeeper of student pathway selection. The label seemed to reference a gatekeeper as a way to ensure equity among pathways, as Counselor F explained:

> We have 10 or 11 pathways. They have to give me their top three. I do my very best to give them their top, you know, top choice, which is impossible to do for everybody, but I had about 85 to 90% so most of them are very happy, you know. But I do have to balance it with you know, boys to girls, you know, African American. I can't have all the girls sitting in nursing and all the boys sitting in welding. So, I have to make sure there's some, you know, blendedness here because we do need men in nursing, we need women in welding. I have to try and watch the numbers a little bit. I'm the gatekeeper.

Counselor H had a method where she worked to learn each students' individual interests, and then made a connection for them to help them get where they wanted to go:

> I find out more about them, their interests, and ask them if they're involved in any extracurricular activities. I look at the ABCs: attendance, discipline, their grades, determine kind of where they are. Then I start connecting them with people in the community that could help further their dream, if they're in that stage of the exploration.

For many schools, when students finally made a selection, there was a signing ceremony. Counselor B said it is "just like you were signed to go to a school to play football, you're signing here to an Academy. I try to have a little fun with it and make it into a big deal."

Freshman academy counselors can influence low socioeconomic students through the function of their job and the opportunity of the career pathway selection process. They can also be of great influence as social capital.

Influence as social capital. This section explains the varying ways the participants utilized their ability to act as social capital for low socioeconomic students. This section reviews how counselors encourage skill development, promote economic potential, provide socio-emotional support, and inspire hope in the future. While this type of support may seem to function as a non-financial resource for students, participants viewed this support for low socioeconomic students as more closely aligned to the financial-based resource support each participant expressed comfort in providing for low socioeconomic students. Consequently, it has been given its own category, since its practical function played a different role for low socioeconomic students than the aforementioned financial or non-financial resources.

The participants each saw the importance of choosing a career pathway from a functional perspective, as well as how that pathway would set up their low socioeconomic students for success. Each freshman academy counselor was also interested in providing foundational skills for their students so their students would be equipped with skills that could last them a lifetime. Counselor C discussed drilling down on what students wanted to do and then explained how she used that to help them:

> First, I asked them what are they thinking about doing. Do you like working with your hands? Do you like helping people? What do you see yourself doing now? So, we'll just go down that path. I also try to connect them with programs.

Counselor D had a similar set of questions to ask students regarding their postsecondary opportunities. He also went into depth about the freshman seminar course and how it provided essential skills for the students to use regardless of their career pathway choice:

> Financial literacy is one big component of those essential skills. They do a job resume, they do a cover letter, they do an application through the course. We teach them job etiquette, you know, how to dress for an interview, shake someone's hand, look someone in the eye, that type of thing. So, they really have those essential skills that they need to be successful in the real world. Before we had this course that was really not taught.

Counselor F agreed:

> It's our jobs to prepare them for the next level, and that is to become young professionals. Some of them will actually get a job when they're 15 or 16 years old, which could be next year. So, when they're behind that counter at McDonald's and people come in, they expect them to be a young adult and young professional. So does their employer. So, it starts right now.

Another benefit of freshman academy counselors encouraging skill development was the potential economic advantage those skills could lend low socioeconomic students.

Many freshman academy counselors saw economic potential as a way to help their low socioeconomic students. Counselor A expressed a desire to try to influence low socioeconomic students and help them recognize how their interests could lead to economic gains:

> I have a student interested in being a plumber, but his uncle said it was a grunt job and he shouldn't do it. I was like wait a minute. I just paid a man like $400 to come fix my toilet. I was like, this is a gold mine opportunity. You know, we are always gonna have to pay someone to come and fix our air conditioning, come and fix our pipes. So, I really helped him – actually got him to go shadow. So, he's on the right path.

When asked explicitly about low socioeconomic students, Counselor B talked about the importance of building relationships and then walking that student through the pathway selection process for the purpose of finding a career that pays well. He said, "I gotta bring the kids to take an interest inventory and start thinking about careers and the need for that job in the community; you know, how much money the occupation makes." Counselor G talked about she helped low socioeconomic students figure out how to use a career pathway and teach them how money works, even if they did not have a specific interest in attending her school:

> What I would do here, is the financial services pathway is going to teach you about money and balance a checkbook and banking and investing. It's going to teach you good life skills that are going to help you manage your money that everybody needs. So that's a good one to choose.

While freshman academy counselors provided support for students regarding their economic potential, socio-emotional support was also a critical type of support that students need.

One of the complexities of the freshman academy counselor position was how focused it was on non-academic, non-career activity for every student, regardless of socioeconomic status. Counselor A explained, "So, because I have freshmen, a lot of my time is that emotional piece. I feel like a lot of my job is more mothering than it is the academic piece." Counselor E also mentioned the mothering aspect of being a freshman academy counselor. When asked if helping

freshmen figure out their postsecondary plans was a significant portion of the job, Counselor E responded and explained the non-academic ways freshman academy counselors can be supportive. She said, “It’s trying to advocate for them, like their mother or their supporter or holding them accountable or telling them when I’m disappointed or have high expectations for them to do the right thing.” This was now part of the role, as a large portion of what freshman academy counselors did was act as a comprehensive resource for students and their related issues.

Freshman academy counselors could meld the nurturing part of their job in with other aspects of their role by building an understanding of each individual student’s needs. Counselor B expounded upon this and said, “At times you feel like you triage a lot of different problems and issues, but I also use a lot of data to guide my work with the kids to address their needs, whether that’s academic, social, emotional.” Counselor C concurred with that point and said, “Majority of my time is spent mediating.” Counselor B explained that a portion of meeting socio-emotional needs is simply being a consistent adult in students’ lives:

> I started off with taking care of kids and basic needs. There’s a lot of kids that come to me in the morning. We kind of debrief about their weekend; kind of what’s happened to them. Kids that come by just to say hey, just to check in; they want that regular person in their life. That consistency. I fill that void.

Counselor B mentioned that building relationships with students was the most impactful part of preparing them for what comes after high school. He said, “The most important thing is to develop a relationship with them. Then, after that, is to talk about those goals, and freshman year and goal setting.” Counselor C placed a big emphasis on the socio-emotional support that freshman academy counselors offer. She explained, “I’m in the hallways every day, I want to be

able to help them if they need something. They can always come in here and I say it over and over and over again because I mean it." Counselor D provided his own analysis:

> Every day is different. I'm in classrooms a lot talking to kids about credits, different guidance lessons, that type of thing. I do a lot of individual counseling with kids or crisis situations. Our students go through a lot of trauma and that carries over to their schooling and how successful they are here at school.

Counselor E built relationships with students by being a resource for student needs. She explained, "You know, I take kids home and take kids to church and take kids to ball games. You know, buy some kids food. Just trying to help." Counselor F said there was no real reason why a student should not get what they need from the school, and she would make sure they found a human connection:

> The sky's the limit. If they're struggling at home and they don't have the support system; we do. You know, there's 100 staff members, I may not be the one that they connect with the most, but I'll look to find that person.

An additional way freshman academy counselors acted as social capital and merged the socio-emotional support responsibilities of their positions was through their work with outside groups who also have academic, social, and behavioral goals. Counselor E illuminated how this could occur in a practical way:

> I do get them involved in different stuff to have a positive high school experience versus a negative. I try to work with attendance and truancy cutting classes and other behavioral issues so they can be successful; maybe going on a college field trip through Upward Bound or Educational Talent Search.

Tolerance of each student was also a key aspect of providing socio-emotional support. Counselor H said, “Students really don’t have a choice but to have a good relationship with me. That’s the expectation. So, one thing is just accepting them for who they are and for where they are. Not being judgmental.” Through this commitment to student skill development, economic gains, and socio-emotional support, freshman academy counselors were able to act as social capital to inspire hope in the future.

Counselor A said the purpose of a freshman academy counselor, with regard to postsecondary opportunities for low-income students, “Has a lot to do with who they are, making them aware of what they want to do, and then showing them the path to how to get there.” Counselor C reiterated how important it was that freshman academy counselors got students to commit to goals:

> I think it’s important for us to really focus on asking them what they really want to do with their career goals. Career goals are big. Like that’s one of our standards is college and career and so that is something that we should be focused on.

Counselor F stated that she believed they had to make sure every option is available to students, regardless of who they were:

> Our job is to make sure that no doors are closed; that they have opportunities abound because I don’t believe any 14 or 15-year-old could tell you right now what they’re going to do with their life. Some of them are dead set, I’m going to be a nurse. That’s great. But I would say there’s probably 10 to 15% of kids who actually know what they’re going to do that actually go and do it. So, my focus is, we’re going to do our best to make sure that you can go and do whatever you want to do when you get there.

Counselor G explained a lot of the role was to get students to understand the importance of these four years in their lives. Counselor G explained, “That’s going to be the foundation of if they apply for college or a trade school. They’re going to look at that transcript.” Counselor A also sounded a hopeful tone on the postsecondary goals aspect of the freshman academy counselor role:

> I always tell them I want there to be so many opportunities for you that you are sitting down with your counselor as a senior with all the colleges that accepted you trying to figure out where you want to go.

Another aspect of focusing on the future was understanding the long-term planning approach to career pathway selection. Counselor B mentioned focusing on this and recognizing the long-term benefit of being a social capital resource to freshmen. He said, “I don’t get the short term here with these kids, but I know 20 years from now I’m gonna get to see them do a lot of cool things. That’s kind of what drives me.” Counselor C viewed the long-term approach as a way to help students find a solid, long-term, career path:

> I think that’s important because you have to have some type of path, or career path, especially when you’re going to college. You see it all the time. You see seniors go to college because they see college as what they supposed to do. Then, when they get to college, they have no major. They have no clue of what they want to do. Somebody needs to be talking to them about that and so I really think that’s the reason why counselors should be the people connecting and collaborating with everybody to focus on their career goals.

Counselor D built long-term planning into his freshman academy seminar course. He explained, “We’re making sure they identify their academy, their pathway, and the culminating project. And

that course has a 10-year plan. They have their four-year plan here at school on how to get through high school." Counselor E explained how a counselor providing social capital for students could be significant long-term. She stated, "I think it's very important for us to provide those opportunities because that can be a driving force in a student's career."

For freshman academy counselors, there were many ways they acted as social capital and provided influence over low socioeconomic students. That influence was often determined by how the freshman academy counselor understood their students, the context of the school environment, and the freshman academy counselor themselves.

Chapter Five: Discussion

This chapter discusses how the findings fit within the context of the problem and research questions of this study, as well as how the findings connected with existing literature and could be used in future research opportunities. This chapter also expresses conclusions derived from the findings. It then offers recommendations that are based upon the conclusions developed from the findings. The conclusions and recommendations were developed through the theoretical framework used for this study. The theoretical framework for this study is Lin's (1999) theory on social capital viewed through the lens of the JCPS rubric for freshman academies and the JCPS freshman academy theory of action (Jefferson County Public Schools, 2018c; Jefferson County Public Schools, 2018d), which were built from the National Career Academy Coalition (NCAC) career academy standards (National Career Academy Coalition, 2018).

Summary of the Problem, Study Significance, and Findings

The problem identified in this study was that low socioeconomic students who do not have access to the same educational opportunities as their higher income peers could live a lower quality of life than those who do have access to those opportunities (Cooper & Mulvey, 2015; Woessman, 2016). The literature explained that high school counselors can act as a form of social capital and influence educational opportunities for their students, particularly low socioeconomic students (McDonough, 1997). This led to two research questions that focused on the knowledge and perceptions of freshman academy counselors regarding college and career opportunities for low socioeconomic students, and how that knowledge and perception could influence freshman academy counselors' guidance regarding low socioeconomic students and their postsecondary career decisions. Regarding this proposition and these research questions, this study bears significance.

The study is significant because it can inform how urban school districts can professionally develop existing counselors to ensure they are well-informed, highly knowledgeable, and equipped to properly engage their low socioeconomic students with regard to college and career opportunities. It can also provide the district with the data necessary to hire counselors who are best positioned to provide equitable college and career opportunities for their low socioeconomic students. Additionally, this study is significant because it creates the opportunity to highlight the inherent social good within higher education. Finally, it is significant because it could help provide policy or administrative recommendations to potentially end any structural barriers to low socioeconomic students accessing postsecondary opportunities. The findings provide the opportunity to discuss this potential significance.

The main findings from the study showed that the freshman academy counselor is a summation of the individual in the role, the school where that person is positioned, and the resources that school has with regard to opportunities for low socioeconomic students. The main findings also explained that the bias that freshman academy counselors exhibit regarding their perception of low socioeconomic students, particularly when considering how race and class may influence low socioeconomic students, could sway how they support their low socioeconomic students' college and career opportunities. Finally, the main findings offered the analysis that freshman academy counselors balance the type of influence they display regarding low socioeconomic students' postsecondary opportunities. From these main level findings, conclusions were derived.

Conclusions

Since this is a qualitative study, it is important to note that the findings are not to be statistically generalized (Yin, 2018). Likewise, the two limitations of the study mentioned in

chapter one, further prevent generalization beyond analytical. The first limitation is that F/RL is not a perfect marker for low socioeconomics or low-income students. Students who receive F/RL can be up to 185% above the poverty threshold (National Center for Education Statistics, 2015). Secondly, race/ethnicity was not deeply analyzed as a part of this study. This is a limitation because there are often overlaps in educational outcomes between low socioeconomic students and students of Color, Black and Hispanic students in particular (Almeida, 2016; R. D. Cox, 2016; Murillo et al., 2017; Welton & Williams, 2015).

This study, and each subsequent conclusion, focused mainly on low socioeconomic students and the influence freshman academy counselors may have regarding their postsecondary opportunities. The conclusions to be pulled from the findings are based on the research questions for the study:

1) Using the knowledge available regarding college and career opportunities, how do freshman academy counselors influence low socioeconomic students' career pathway selections?
2) How do freshman academy counselors' perceptions of college and career opportunities for low socioeconomic students influence low socioeconomic students' career pathway selections?

Using the knowledge available regarding college and career opportunities, how do freshman academy counselors influence low socioeconomic students' career pathway selections? The counselors themselves, the school resources, and the student demographics each mattered when determining how a counselor may have operated as social capital for low socioeconomic students regarding their postsecondary opportunities. In the context of the full findings and the theoretical framework, this conclusion suggested that how a counselor utilized

their own being to facilitate information, offer credibility, or influence decision makers through social capital (Lin, 1999) was dependent upon what information they themselves were familiar with, what credibility their resources may have offered, and what decision makers they may have had access to influence. It did not mean that freshman academy counselors could not achieve the JCPS freshman academy theory of action (JCPS, 2018c; JCPS 2018d). Freshman academy counselors from District One were still able to influence a sense of belonging for low socioeconomic students, as well as create opportunities for personal and career development for their students.

Several counselors mentioned their personal narrative when they explained why they became a counselor to begin with; the inequity of school resources also seemed to influence how each counselor conducted their postsecondary preparation responsibilities. Student load was different at each school, too, which many counselors acknowledged had an effect on their decision making and prioritization. The findings that supported this conclusion were also consistent with the literature on this topic.

Caseloads for counselors have increased (Christian et al., 2017), and time has been cited as an important resource for counselors to give to students to help them succeed towards postsecondary opportunities (McKillip et al., 2012). These were two of the resources that varied among the freshman academy counselors who participated in this study, which suggests that these could be consequences of the unique context in which each counselor found themselves. Given that each school and counselor had their own distinctive context, the lack of consistent district-wide norms was also a conclusion established in the findings.

The findings indicate that when freshman academy counselors did not know how success was defined—either for themselves or their students—they created their own measures of

success. This contributed to inconsistencies throughout District One with regard to freshman academy counselor expectations regarding influencing low socioeconomic students' postsecondary opportunities. Within the full context of the findings, this conclusion showed the independence and uniqueness of each freshman academy counselor and their institutions may have made it more difficult to truly recognize potential resource inequities that may have existed between academies within District One. Similarly, considering the theoretical framework and Lin's (1999) theory of social capital, lack of district-level standards could have eroded credibility for a freshman academy counselor if that counselor was at a school that was underresourced or unaware of its low focus on postsecondary opportunities for low socioeconomic students compared to its peers. Likewise, viewing the findings through the lens of the JCPS freshman academy theory of action (JCPS, 2018c; JCPS 2018d), which was also part of this study's theoretical framework, showed that the inconsistency of resources and knowledge could have made it more difficult for freshman academy counselors to measure a student's sense of belonging or their personal and career skills. It did not mean, however, that freshman academy counselors did not work to provide postsecondary opportunities for their low socioeconomic students. It meant that some freshman academy counselors may have made it a different level priority than their peers without knowing it.

Freshman academy counselors within District One did not have agreement on the importance of students' postsecondary career goals as an aspect of their job. The findings also revealed that freshman academy counselors were not evaluated by the same system, in the same manner, or even within the same time period. This created inconsistency with the postsecondary preparation services each freshman academy counselor provided to their students.

Hill (2011) called the high school college counseling system a core piece of the infrastructure of the student support system in high school, defining infrastructure in large part as the strategies and practices to help students attain their postsecondary goals. Not having a clear infrastructure in place throughout District One for the freshman academy counselor role could be one of the causes of the inconsistency in norms and standards. Engberg and Gilbert (2013) mentioned how students attending majority low socioeconomic schools often do not receive as much college counseling as their peers. Given the inequity in resources that seemed to exist among the freshman academy counselors who participated in this study, differing levels of postsecondary preparation and resources could be one of the consequences of a lack of system-wide norms and standards. Related to district-wide inconsistency is the conclusion from the findings that counselors themselves are not aligned on all aspects of how to treat low socioeconomic students with regard to postsecondary opportunities and resources.

How do freshman academy counselors' perceptions of college and career opportunities for low socioeconomic students influence low socioeconomic students' career pathway selections? The findings show that freshman academy counselors agreed that the socioeconomic status of a student was a condition that freshman academy counselors must contend with, but they remained in conflict over how to deal with this condition. Specifically, viewed within the context of the JCPS rubric for freshman academies and the JCPS freshman academy theory of action (JCPS, 2018c; JCPS 2018d), which was a part of the theoretical framework for this study, there was debate among the freshman academy counselors on whether or not low socioeconomic students needed additional supports on academic knowledge and skills, and sense of belonging. It did not mean, however, that freshman academy counselors did not attempt to facilitate information to their low socioeconomic students or influence decision

makers on their behalf, as Lin's (1999) social capital theory described. It meant that the freshman academy counselors did so explicitly from the perspective of attempting to provide financial or economic gain for their low socioeconomic students.

The freshman academy counselors believed that providing financial resources for low socioeconomic students was critical, but there were differing opinions on what to do beyond financial support. Some counselors thought that low socioeconomic students, by definition, experienced more trauma and challenges and needed additional wraparound supports to deal with those challenges. Other counselors did not have that opinion and even resented the idea.

Historically, this fits the narrative of the counselor as a gatekeeper, choosing what opportunities and resources are offered to which students (McDonough, 2005). This historic use of the counselor role could be what drove some of the freshman academy counselors who participated in this study to determine that non-financial supports did not need to go to low socioeconomic students any more than other students. Furthermore, counselors have received scrutiny in the past for how they have rendered their services disparately to different student groups (Bryan et al., 2011), and there is an ongoing discussion about whether or not additional academic support for low socioeconomic students who also struggle academically can be beneficial to the student at all (Castleman & Goodman, 2015). Consequently, this conclusion from the findings has the potential to create a dichotomy of outcomes and expectations for low socioeconomic students, depending on the socioeconomic philosophy of their freshman academy counselor. This was important for the final conclusion derived from the findings, which was that counselors were a form of social capital for low socioeconomic students.

High school counselors were a form of social capital for low socioeconomic students, and likely provided access to postsecondary opportunities that low socioeconomic students otherwise

might not have access to. In the full context of the findings and theoretical framework, this conclusion demonstrated that social capital was manifested in many different ways by the freshman academy counselors who participated in the study, but each way remained true to Lin's (1999) theory of social capital. This conclusion also suggested that the JCPS freshman academy theory of action (JCPS, 2018c; JCPS 2018d) could be foundational for District One freshman academy counselors, as each demonstrated a commitment to being a form of social capital that created a sense of belonging and helped improve student academic, personal, and career opportunities. While this conclusion indicates each freshman academy counselor operated as a form of social capital, it does not indicate that each did so the same way for students, or even equally.

With the varying degrees of influence that freshman academy counselors had on the career selection process in career academies in District One, each of the efforts to recruit, diversify, select, or directly choose pathways for freshmen seemed to guide what students might do after high school. Each freshman academy counselor believed in using their being as social capital for economic gains for low socioeconomic students, and socio-emotional support for every student.

The participants also mentioned how their work to professionally develop students could positively impact long term financial earnings, which the literature mentioned as an aspect of social capital. A. B. Cox (2016) explained that social capital is utilizing a social network to provide access to support, information, and resources that an individual can use to gain employment, an academic credential, or deal with difficult decisions. As the freshman academy counselors who participated in this study demonstrated their willingness to act in this way for their students, long term financial success for low socioeconomic students could be a potential

consequence for the actions of the freshman academy counselors who act as a form of social capital. The literature also points to a potential cause of freshman academy counselors behaving as a form of social capital. Small learning communities help create an environment for institutional agents to act as a form of social capital for low socioeconomic students (Holland & Farmer-Hinton, 2009). Given that career academies are an attempt to create small learning communities for students (Lanford & Maruco, 2018), this could be a potential cause as to why the freshman academy counselors who participated in this study chose to operate as a form of social capital for their low socioeconomic students. The conclusions derived from the findings produced implications for practice for District One to consider.

Implications for Practice

The implications for practice for District One focus mainly on how to ensure that freshman academy counselors are equipped with the resources to best provide postsecondary opportunities for low socioeconomic students. The implications for practice are 1) to consider a standardized evaluation system for academy counselors, 2) develop a professional development seminar on role expectations for existing academy counselors, 3) develop postsecondary curriculum on the counselor's role in a career academy, and 4) conduct an analysis on counselor-to-student ratios in District One career academies.

Consider a standardized evaluation system for academy counselors. One main conclusion gathered from the findings was how counselors in District One were not evaluated in any consistent, system-wide fashion. An implication for practice within District One is that the district should consider creating a standardized evaluation system for academy counselors generally or freshman academy counselors specifically. Strear, Duffy, and Aste (2019) provide a resource outlining existing counselor evaluation practices and guidelines across all fifty states.

District One could use this analysis as an outline for a potential district-wide evaluation system for their counselors. This may help create an organized system around the freshman academy counselor position.

A potential challenge with implicating a system-wide evaluation process would be the loss of autonomy that schools and academy counselors currently have. It would also require district level personnel to ensure the evaluations are done with fidelity. However, if done well, this evaluation system could also be undergirded by a district-wide professional development resource for existing freshman academy counselors.

Develop a professional development seminar on role expectations for existing academy counselors. The findings showed a lack of district-wide consistency among expectations for freshman academy counselors. As an implication for practice, District One may decide if or how they want to address this issue. One way for the district to address this challenge would be to develop a professional development course on expectations of the role for existing academy counselors generally, or freshman academy counselors specifically. This could create a standard of success that all academy counselors could operate from in their daily tasks, particularly on postsecondary opportunities for low socioeconomic students, as well as the basis from which administrators could conduct evaluations. This seminar could be developed internally through the district or in conjunction with a local postsecondary institution.

This suggestion is not without challenges. One challenge would revolve around developing the right incentives for existing academy counselors to participate in the professional development, as well as the areas of the academy counselor position to expressly highlight. Another challenge would be creating a timeline for implementation and development. A final challenge would be finding the personnel to lead each seminar. Still, this suggestion, as well as

the next suggestion, could go a long way in standardizing the quality of services academy counselors provide their low socioeconomic students in particular and their students in general with regard to postsecondary opportunities.

Develop postsecondary curriculum on the counselor's role in a career academy. The findings highlighted that there is a lack of clarity regarding what success looks like for freshman academy counselors. A potential implication for practice is that District One may decide to clarify success for future academy counselors in general, or freshman academy counselors specifically. To achieve this goal, District One could work with a local postsecondary institution to develop curriculum on the counselor's ideal role in a career academy, particular regarding college and career opportunities for low socioeconomic students, for collegiate students studying to become counselors. This resource could provide standardized training for a portion of incoming academy counselors.

Similar to the aforementioned professional development seminar, there are some potential drawbacks for this potential curriculum. This curriculum may take time to develop and implement and there is no guarantee all new hires would come through the postsecondary institution that provided this curriculum. To offer this curriculum, though, in tandem with professional development that covers the same topics and an evaluation system that measures the same outcomes, could significantly alter the freshman academy experience for both counselors and students. Then, once curriculum has been developed for existing and aspiring counselors, District One could look to review counselor's student caseloads.

Conduct an analysis on counselor-to-student ratios in District One career academies. An additional consideration brought up by participants was the varying number of students with whom each counselor worked. Given this reality, District One could review its

existing counselor-to-student ratios in its freshman academies. Counselor caseload can impact how counselors influence students, particularly underclassmen (Engberg & Gilbert, 2013). Assessing this issue for each academy within District One could help assess whether or not the district should invest in more counselors altogether or reorganize their existing resources to even out caseloads.

There are challenges with this suggestion. This could be a significant time investment that the district may not have the capacity for; it could also be behind other major priorities. However, knowing that the ratios of freshman academy counselors are vastly different from one school to another and potentially influencing how each counselor meets low socioeconomic students' needs on postsecondary opportunities, it is something to be considered. Aside from these implications for practice within District One, there are recommendations for future research that should be considered as a result of the findings. The conclusions derived from the findings, as well as questions concerning the possible implications of practice within the field, produced several future research recommendations.

Recommendations for Future Research

The research recommendations generated from the conclusions of the findings are to 1) complete a longitudinal study on a freshman academy cohort, 2) deeply analyze the intersection of race/ethnicity and socioeconomic status, and 3) review the perception of counselors as social capital from the student perspective.

Complete a longitudinal study on a freshman academy cohort. For District One, there has never been a longitudinal study completed on a specific cohort of students coming through the career academy model. Completing an analysis on a set of students, beginning their freshman year and culminating with high school graduation, could provide a comprehensive analysis on

how the career academy model impacts low socioeconomic students and their peers. Another study could be conducted around the intersection of race/ethnicity and socioeconomic status.

Deeply analyze the intersection of race/ethnicity and socioeconomic status. A potential future study could focus on the intersection of race/ethnicity and socioeconomics among students and how that affects counselors influence on postsecondary opportunities for their students. Each of the schools in this analysis had majority low socioeconomic students; some were also majority-minority schools with regard to race. Analyzing the perceptions of the academy experience of counselors and low socioeconomic students, who are also Student of Color, could provide useful findings for District One. The student perspective could also be analyzed from other lenses, too.

Review the perception of counselors as social capital from the student perspective. This study focused on a systems-level analysis by talking explicitly with counselors about their perceptions of low socioeconomic students with regard to postsecondary opportunities. Talking to low socioeconomic students on how they perceived the social capital capacity of their freshman academy counselors would provide an analysis over the same system but from a different perspective. That perspective could provide value in assessing how counselors influence low socioeconomic students' college and career opportunities.

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Appendix A

Sample Participant Interview Email Request

Hello,

My name is OJ Oleka and I am a doctoral student at Bellarmine University. I am reaching out to conduct an interview for my dissertation. I am doing a study about high school counselors and their impact on low socioeconomic students' college and career pathways within the context of an urban high school with a career academy model. I am gathering data within [District One] career academy high schools, specifically freshman counselors, which is why I have identified you as a potential participant in this study. Attached is a one-page document that goes into a little bit more detailed explanation.

Do you have some time to speak with me, so I can finish up this data collection in good form? This interview is specifically for my doctoral studies and will help craft a study on high school counselors and how they could influence low socioeconomic students' postsecondary opportunities. My hope is that this research can be published and used to inform decision making regarding a deeper understanding of the critical role high school counselors play in postsecondary outcomes.

Please let me know if you're able to chat, as well as your preferred availability. Thanks very much and I look forward to hearing back from you. Let me know if you have any questions.

Thank you,

OJ Oleka
Leadership in Higher Education PhD Candidate
Bellarmine University
ooleka01@bellarmine.edu
502-545-2897

Appendix B

Sample Attachment to Participant Interview Email Request

High School Counselors as Social Capital in a Career Academy High School Model for Low-Income Students: A Case Study
Subject Informed Consent

Introduction and Background Information

You are invited to participate in a research study. The study is being conducted OJ Oleka, a PhD candidate at Bellarmine University, and Dr. Donald Mitchell, Jr., professor of education at Bellarmine University. The study is sponsored by the Department of Higher Education Leadership at Bellarmine University and has been approved by the [District One] Institutional Review Board. The study will take at a location you prefer. Approximately 12 subjects will be invited to participate. Your participation in this study will last for up to two hours.

Purpose

The purpose of this research study is to explore the influence of high school counselors on low socioeconomic students' college and career pathways within the context of an urban high school with a career academy model. This research may be used for future study or policy recommendations for supporting low socioeconomic students.

Procedures

In this study, you will be asked to engage in a face-to-face interview about your experience as a high school counselor at a career academy. OJ Oleka will conduct the interviews and they will take approximately 60 minutes to complete. You are free to skip questions that make you feel uncomfortable or prosecutable under the law. After the audio files of the interviews will be transcribed by OJ Oleka. The interview transcriptions will be matched for accuracy with the audio files and the audio files will be immediately destroyed. Your completed interview transcripts will be stored on password-protected personal computers. Your demographic data and other identifying information will be kept separate from the data and your name will not be on any of the data.

Voluntary Participation

Your participation in this research study is voluntary. You may refuse to participate or withdraw your consent at any time without penalty or losing benefit to which you are otherwise entitled.

Potential Risks

There are no reasonably foreseeable risks.

Benefits

The data collected in this study may not benefit you directly. However, the information learned from this research may be helpful to others in the future. Participants will have access to any clinical findings; that access will be presented in the format of the completed dissertation.

Confidentiality

Although absolute confidentiality cannot be guaranteed, confidentiality will be protected to the extent permitted by law. The study sponsor or the Institutional Review Board may inspect your research records. Should the data collected in this research study be published, your identity will not be revealed.

Your Rights as a Research Subject and Contact Persons

If you have any questions about your rights as a research subject, you may call the Bellarmine University Institutional Review Board Office at 502.272.8032. You will be given the opportunity to discuss any questions, in confidence, with a member of the Board. This is an independent committee composed of members of the University community and lay members of the community not connected with this institution. You may also email the [District One] Institutional Review Board Chair, [District One Board Chair name and email]. Both the Bellarmine and [District One] Boards have reviewed this study.

You acknowledge that all your present questions have been answered in language you can understand. If you have any questions about the study, please contact OJ Oleka at 502.545.2897, or Donald Mitchell at 502.272.8135.

Consent

You have discussed the above information and hereby consent to voluntarily participate in this study. You have been given a signed copy of this consent form.

____ _______________________

Signature of Subject or Legal Representative Date Signed

____ _______________________

Signature of Investigator Date Signed

____ _______________________

Signature of Person Explaining Consent if other than Investigator Date Signed

Appendix C

Sample Information Sheet for Participants

High School Counselors as Social Capital in a Career Academy High School Model for Low-Income Students: A Case Study

First Name:

Last Name:

Title:

Years of Experience as a Counselor at this School:

Race:

Gender:

Appendix D

Sample Semi Structured Interview Protocol

Introduction Script

Thank you for agreeing to speak with me today. As a reminder, my name is OJ Oleka and I am conducting data collection for my dissertation in order to complete my doctoral program. My topical focus is high school counselors and how they could influence low socioeconomic students within an urban career academy context on their college and career decisions. This information is for a research study. When it is published, your name will be left out and replaced with a pseudonym. To start us out, if you could quickly fill out this information sheet, that would be great! Let me know when you're finished as we'll get started. (Hand participant information sheet)

1. **Question:** People become high school counselors for different reasons. Can you give me the brief story of how you got to this role?

2. **Question:** High school counselors wear many different hats. Can you tell me what a day in your job looks like? **Follow up:** How much of your time gets to be dedicated to helping freshman with their career pathway stuff?

3. **Question:** Explain to me how career pathway selection works here. What type of role do you get to play?

4. **Question:** Let me know the top three most people/individuals who are influential to a student selecting a career pathway and tell me why you put them there. **Follow Up:** Why did/didn't you put yourself in the top three?

5. **Question:** When it comes to life after high school, what do you think is the purpose of a freshman high school counselor? **Follow Up:** Would you say helping freshman figure out their career & college opportunity is a significant part of your job?

6. **Question:** Based on what you see every day, tell me what you think the opportunities are for low socioeconomic students after high school. **Follow Up:** Do you, in your role as a counselor, play a role in that at all?

7. **Question:** The school where you teach is majority low-income and also majority students of Color. What are your thoughts on that? **Follow Up:** Does that play a role in how you approach your work?

8. **Question:** I want to bring your attention to the [District One survey]. There are two questions I want to ask you about. One question says, "[District One survey question]." For 9th graders at your school, [school specific percentage] of students who are F/RL said they agreed or strongly agreed. The agreement percentage for all 9th grade students at your school is [school specific percentage]. The district percentage for agreement for F/RL 9th grade students is [District One percentage]. The agreement for all 9th grade

students is [District One percentage]. Do you think you or other freshman academy counselors influence these results at all? **Follow Up:** Do you think a freshman's experience selecting their career pathway plays a role in their answer to this question at all? **Second Follow Up:** Can you tell me why you feel that way?

9. **Question:** The second question on the [District One survey] I want to hear your thoughts on is one that asks about college preparation directly. It says, "[District One survey question]." For 9th graders at your school, [school specific percentage] of students who are F/RL said they agreed or strongly agreed. The agreement percentage for all 9th grade students at your school is [school specific percentage]. The district percentage for agreement for F/RL 9th grade students is [District One percentage]. The agreement for all 9th grade students is [District One percentage]. Do you think you or other freshman academy counselors influence these results at all? **Follow Up:** Do you think a freshman's experience selecting their career pathway plays a role in their answer to this question at all? **Second Follow Up:** Can you tell me why you feel that way?

10. **Question:** What resources do you have available for low socioeconomic student postsecondary success? **Follow Up:** Do you think you have everything you need?

11. **Question:** Let's say you meet a freshman student from a low socioeconomic background during the first week of school. They say, "I need to figure out what to do after high school." How do you advise them?

12. **Question:** How are you evaluated on the career readiness portion of your role as a counselor? **Follow Up:** Do you think that is the best way to evaluate you and your peers?

13. **Question:** Is there anything else you would like to add?

Appendix E

Sample Documentation Sheet

Social Capital (Lin, 1999)	JCPS (2018c) Theory of Action Principles
Informational Flow Exertion of Influence Credibility of Credential	Sense of Belonging Academic Knowledge and Skills Personal and Career Skills

How does the counselor's knowledge influence this document?

How does the counselor's perception of the students influence this document?

How does the availability (or lack thereof) of resources influence this document?

Follow Up Questions

Overall Reflection

Appendix F

Sample Principal Notification Email

Hello,

My name is OJ Oleka and I am a doctoral student at Bellarmine University. I am reaching out to you because I am seeking your permission to conduct an interview with your freshman counselor for my dissertation. To make you aware, this study has been approved by the Institutional Review Board (IRB) for both Bellarmine University and [District One].

I am doing a study about high school counselors and their impact on low socioeconomic students' college and career pathways within the context of an urban high school with a career academy model. I am gathering data within [District One] career academy high schools, specifically freshman counselors, which is why I have identified your school as a potential site to interview your freshman counselor for this study. Attached is both a one-page document and a sample email that, upon your consent, I will send to your freshman counselor to seek their participation.

This interview is specifically for my doctoral studies and will help craft a study on high school counselors and how they could influence low socioeconomic students' postsecondary opportunities. My hope is that this research can be published and used to inform decision making regarding a deeper understanding of the critical role high school counselors play in postsecondary outcomes. As the principal of this school, I am hopeful to get your support in this study. I am asking for an hour of your freshman counselor's time in order to complete the interview. While the study has been approved by the district, participation for each of your counselors is entirely voluntary.

Please let me know if you approve. Thanks very much and I look forward to hearing back from you. Let me know if you have any questions.

OJ Oleka

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